

Bellarmine University

**ScholarWorks@Bellarmine**

---

Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Capstones

Graduate Research

---

3-30-2018

# An Interpretive Study of African American Female Elementary Principals Experiences in a Southeastern Public Urban School District

Tiffany Marshall

tiffany.marshall@jefferson.kyschools.us

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.bellarmino.edu/tdc>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Elementary Education Commons](#), and the [Urban Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Marshall, Tiffany, "An Interpretive Study of African American Female Elementary Principals Experiences in a Southeastern Public Urban School District" (2018). *Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Capstones*. 50. <https://scholarworks.bellarmino.edu/tdc/50>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research at ScholarWorks@Bellarmine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Capstones by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@Bellarmine. For more information, please contact [jstemmer@bellarmine.edu](mailto:jstemmer@bellarmine.edu), [kpeers@bellarmine.edu](mailto:kpeers@bellarmine.edu).

Running head: CAREER PATHS

An Interpretive Study of African American Female Elementary Principals Experiences in a  
Southeastern Public Urban School District

Tiffany Marshall  
Bellarmino University

### **Abstract**

This study is an interpretive study of African American female elementary principals' experiences in a Southeastern public urban school district. The purpose of this interpretive research is to specifically examine five African American female principals' perceptions of supports and barriers on the career pathway to the principalship in urban public elementary schools. The questions for this research included: How do African American females experience the process of becoming elementary school principals in a Southeastern, urban district? How have African American female principals described their experiences with educational institutions, communities and professional organizations? Tillman and Lomotey's research is used to explain the significance of African American principal leadership in the elementary K-12 setting after *Brown v Board of Education*. According to Jean-Marie (2013), even though all leaders within educational institutions face numerous challenges in terms of achieving success, African American female principals often face unique challenges that are linked to their own cultural background. This research supports work from Schwandt (1994), who explained that an interpretative lens focuses on worldview values and embraces subjective interpretation while acknowledging such interpretations are socially constructed and therefore, shaped by the researcher's own stand or position on a topic. The participants shared stories of experiences, supports from their family, spirituality, and community connection. The data provided evidence that life experiences, educational background, and educational programs informed the analysis of the career pathway to the elementary principalship.

### **Acknowledgements**

I feel truly blessed to be able to complete this journey. There were so many times that I doubted myself and I didn't feel that this goal was attainable. With faith, determination, patience, and support all goals can be reached. I thank my parents, Carey and Karen Eaves, for teaching me the power of perseverance. I appreciate that you taught me to not give up and see your goals to completion. This journey couldn't have been completed without three specific people in my life. My husband, Dr. John Marshall, encouraged me when I was defeated and supported me when I wanted to give up. Thank you, John, for challenging me to be better, encouraging me to be great, sharing your vision, and loving me unconditionally. This journey began with my sister, Dr. April Brooks, and words can't express how much she means to me. Having you share this moment with me makes the journey that much sweeter. My best friend, Na'Tasha Ben, has been a sounding board since the beginning. Only a true best friend can listen to you and support you through a journey that has taken years to complete. John, April, and Na'Tasha: thank you for helping me through this tireless journey and supporting me to obtain this accomplishment. I'm blessed to have a wonderful mother-in-law, Dr. Bonnie Marshall, who help me see this to completion and dedicated many hours to reading my work.

I dedicate this dissertation to my three daughters Kaden, Kennedy, and Kori Marshall. I look forward to watching the dynamic women you will become. You all have been so patient and supportive when I had to work. I want you to know that I believe in you all and will always support your dreams just as you have supported mine. This journey has taught me the power of perseverance and I will continue to teach you the importance of never giving up on your dreams and goals. You can do it and you all are destined for greatness. I am ecstatic to have completed

my doctoral degree and successfully defended my dissertation, but you all will always be my greatest accomplishment.

**Table of Contents**

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
List of Tables .....	viii
List of Figures .....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Background of the Study .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	4
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Research Questions .....	5
Significance of the Study .....	6
Definition of Terms .....	6
Theoretical Framework .....	7
Organization and Structure of the Study .....	11
Summary .....	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	13
Introduction .....	13
Career Paths .....	13
Theories .....	16
The Role of the Principal in Urban Elementary Schools .....	17
African American Females in Education .....	20
The Historical Perspective .....	22
Challenges Faced by African American Women in Leadership .....	25
Challenges of Working in High Poverty Schools .....	27
Preparation Programs .....	30
Elementary Education .....	31
Race and Gender .....	32
Advanced Degree and Training .....	33
Career Development .....	35
Critical Race Theory on Career Pathways .....	36
Chapter 3: Research Methodology .....	39

Introduction .....	39
Interpretive Case Study Research Design .....	39
Participant Recruitment .....	41
Case Profile .....	43
Data Sources .....	44
Analysis .....	45
Transformational Leadership and Social Cognitive Theories as Analytical Tools .....	46
Researcher Positionality .....	48
Research Questions .....	49
Data Collection Procedures .....	50
Online Survey .....	53
Interviews .....	53
Focus Groups .....	55
School and District Artifacts .....	56
Data Analysis .....	57
Chapter 4: Results .....	65
Introduction .....	65
Results: Surveys .....	67
Results: Interviews .....	69
Results: Focus Group Discussions (FGD) .....	89
Results: Artifacts .....	91
Triangulation of Findings .....	93
Chapter 4 Summary .....	95
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	97
Discussion of Findings .....	97
Theoretical Implications .....	99
Support Systems .....	99
Building Relationships with Community Stakeholders .....	104
Barriers .....	105
Practical Implications .....	109
Future Research Implications .....	120

References .....	121
Appendix A: Online Survey.....	137
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	138
Appendix C: Focus Group Questions .....	139



**List of Tables**

Table 1. Data analysis .....	64
Table 2. Breakdown of the principal perspectives on the support systems that have influenced the career paths of African American female principals .....	71
Table 3. Breakdown of the principal perspectives on the perceived barriers that have influenced the career paths of African American female principals .....	78
Table 4. Breakdown of the principal perspectives on how educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations have helped to support the career paths of African American female principals .....	83

**List of Figures**

Figure 1. Data Collection for Participants .....	53
Figure 2. Illustration of RQ1 Interview Findings .....	70
Figure 3. Illustration of RQ2 Interview Findings .....	82

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Background of the Study**

The work of African American educators is of historical and cultural significance when examining the experiences of African American women who serve as principals in urban elementary schools. An examination of the pathways of female principals who work in public elementary schools might shed new light on the experiences of African American women serving in these professional roles. According to Tillman (2008), the tradition of leadership excellence in African American schools began in the 1860s, a period when African American educators played an essential role in the building and operation of public and private schools, especially urban elementary schools (Jackson, 2012). Tillman added that since then, African American educators have also been instrumental in securing funding and other necessary school resources, collaborating with African American communities, and serving dual roles as educators and activists to educate African American children.

Allen (2015), Freeman (2010), Mule (2010), and Cowan Pitre (2014) advanced a common narrative that African American educators, especially principals, often share a collective belief held by African American communities that posits education is integral to enhancing the lives of children (Tillman, 2008). Jackson (2012) noted that, by the second half of the 20th century, African American teachers and principals were regarded as important role models and respected leaders in their respective communities. This high regard was due to beliefs that these professionals had the potential to be powerful sources of positive influence in the lives of school-age children. According to Stanford (2010), African American educators and principals are among the African American community's "middle class."

The historical literature on African American school administrators consists of two main periods: (a) a pre-Brown (*Brown v Board of Education Topeka*) era and the employment situations of the African American educators and school administrators, and (b) a post-Brown era that began immediately after the decision in that case. To understand these periods, it is essential to understand the *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka*, 247 U. S. 483 (1954) case, which radically changed the U.S. educational system. Klein (2014) acknowledged the case as one of the greatest decisions made by the U.S. Supreme Court during the 20th century. During this important case, the Court unanimously agreed that the racial segregation of children in public institutions of education was a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The case ruling negated the earlier decision in *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896), which legalized racial segregation in U.S. public schools. Judges in the *Plessy v Ferguson* case affirmed that segregation within public facilities, such as schools, was within the confines of the Constitution to the extent that distinct equality existed between White and African American facilities. Details of these two landmark cases are provided in Chapter 2; however, it is important to note here that the periods before and after the *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* ruling are defining elements of the experiences of African American women who currently serve as principals in U.S. urban elementary schools.

The experiences of African American principals in urban elementary schools is historically rooted in the pervasive ethnic and racial disparities of education. Fuentes (2013) noted that these disparities often mirrored ethnic and racial disparities observed in socioeconomic statuses, health outcomes, and healthcare. Such disparities are also evident in the academic performance gap between African American and White students (Hopson, Lee, & Tang, 2014).

With respect to the experiences of African American women who serve as principals in urban elementary schools, researchers (Jean-Marie, 2013; Wilson & Roscigno, 2010) have considered the influences of race and gender on leadership. Despite the small number of female African American principals who work in predominantly White schools, race and gender continue to be barriers for others who wish to pursue leadership positions. Such barriers may discourage African Americans and other minorities from seeking leadership positions as principals. The current study involved an examination of the experiences of female African American principals in public elementary schools, thereby adding to the knowledge of experiences among this group, as well as their pathways to principalship.

While addressing the issue of African American women's leadership, Milner and Lomotey (2013) contended that school principalships have historically been predominantly held by Whites, and the majority of teachers are White females. In this regard, the researchers identified a number of issues faced by female African American principals. First, they argued that female African American principals are often subject to negative ethnic and racial stereotypes that undermine their authority and credibility. The researchers added that these principals also experienced poor support from other stakeholders in the schools they lead. Finally, the researchers also contended that female African American principals are often left out of informal relationships with their colleagues, suggesting that Whites and African American males constitute most of the informal relationships.

Smith (2013) claimed that African American principals are often forced to enhance their performance and positions by manipulating their cultural backgrounds. Principals may use this strategy to locate mentors, managers, and colleagues from whom they can learn and develop,

professionally. The experiences of female African American principals, especially those working in urban elementary schools, is bound by gender and racial disparities.

Brooks (2012) posited that female African American principals are often marginalized as educational leaders via placement in poor and failing schools. According to the researcher, principals are expected to discipline students and help them achieve their academic potential based on relevant standards and legislation. In this way, principals are tasked with many critical responsibilities, such as facilitating educational reform and enhancing the quality of student education (Queen, Peel, & Shipman, 2013). In urban elementary school settings, principals play crucial roles during students' formative stages (Queen et al., 2013). Therefore, having a group of principals that is diverse in terms of gender and race may be of benefit to urban elementary schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Existing research on educational leadership examines varying levels of leadership within U.S. schools. However, the leadership needs of African American women is in need of scholarly attention from researchers and policymakers (Dowden-White, 2011; Hamilton-Honey, 2013). African American women in positions of educational leadership face a number of barriers that can impede their leadership success, including race and gender biases (Jean-Marie, 2013; Sanchez-Hucle & Davis, 2010). Williams (2014) noted that the contributions of female educational leaders are often eclipsed by the patriarchy that rules educational systems, oppressing women in leadership positions. Accordingly, the current study involved an examination of the pathways to success among elementary school principals, with a focus on female African American principals in public elementary schools.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretative research is to explore the experiences of African American women who serve as principals in urban public elementary schools, despite the oppressions of institutionalized racism. Research indicates that race can influence the career pathways of African American principals working of public elementary schools (Jean-Marie, 2013; Sanchez-Hucle & Davis, 2010), especially in terms of racial discrimination. This study was designed to reveal the dynamics that influence the career pathways of female African American principals in public elementary schools.

The contributions of female leaders are often overshadowed by prevailing systems that supports patriarchal leadership, to the oppression of women leaders. Female African American leaders across a variety of fields and sectors experience this exclusion. African American women who overcome these barriers and obtain positions of educational leadership can contribute to the existing literature and shed new light on systematic changes needed to attract more African American women into principal positions.

**Research Questions**

**RQ1.** How do African American female experience the process of becoming elementary school principals in a Southeastern, urban district?

**RQ1a.** What perceived support systems did they find beneficial?

**RQ1b.** What perceived barriers did they encounter?

**RQ2.** How have African American female principals describe their experiences with educational institutions, communities and professional organizations?

**RQ2a.** How have educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations helped to support the career paths of African American female principals?

**RQ2b.** How have educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations hindered the career paths of African American female principals?

### **Significance of the Study**

Findings from this study may be significant in a number of ways. First, results may offer a new understanding of the experiences that influenced the career pathways of African American women who become elementary school principals. Second, the study may also reveal how dominant structures within educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations support or hinder the career paths of female African American principals in public elementary schools. This study may also support systems that female African American principals use to overcome perceived barriers to principalship. Fourth, policymakers and school district stakeholders may use study results to introduce programs designed to help female African American educators attain principalships.

Fifth, the study will contribute to the fledgling body of literature on the professional pathways of African American women who become principals of elementary schools. Given the professional challenges faced by principals, it is important to examine professional pathways available to principals. Therefore, this research study examined pathways to the public elementary school principalship, with a focus on African American females in public elementary schools.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Career path.** The process through which an elementary school teacher becomes a principal.

**Cultural background.** An individual's religious, racial, and ethnic origins.

**Elementary school.** The first years of compulsory education in the United States.



**Principal.** A school administrator at the elementary level.

**Race.** Has been used in this case to mean either African-Americans or Whites.

**Scholars.** Has been used interchangeably with “researchers”.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Interpretive lens.** The researcher examined the study phenomenon through an interpretive lens, which led to the decision to carry out an interpretive case study. According to Schwandt (1994), an interpretive design can help place researchers on the same plane as their subjects. An interpretive lens allows for the acquisition of insights into “the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). The activity of interpretation is taken as an ontological condition rather than a methodological device. Researchers who wish to use this method must accept a particular way or model of life. Schwandt’s interpretative worldview is one that values and embraces subjective interpretation while acknowledging those interpretations as socially-constructed by the researcher’s own position on a topic. Therefore, the researcher’s perspective within an investigation is of importance. According to Schwandt, research through an interpretive lens requires an understanding of the subjects’ experiences, from the researcher’s perspective, as well as from the subjects’. Interpretive researchers construct their knowledge via shared understandings, practices, and other similar strategies (Schwandt, 1994).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), four philosophical assumptions serve as key premises of interpretive frameworks in qualitative research. Interpretive frameworks may consist of social science or social justice theories. Social science theories range from leadership and attribution theories to theories on political influence and control. Conversely, social justice theories are advocacy or participatory theories designed to produce changes or respond to social

justice problems. A social science leadership theory was utilized for the current study. This interpretive lens allowed the researcher to examine individuals' views on educational leadership and career pathways (Andrade, 2009). Theories on educational leadership and career pathways provided a foundation for the current case study of female African American principals' experiences of achieving principalships in urban public elementary schools, despite the oppression of institutionalized racism.

**Transformational leadership theory.** A successful educational leader is often characterized by transformational leadership traits (Quin, Deris, Bischoff, & Johnson, 2015). According to transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978), transformational leaders are those who influence change among their subordinates and social systems. Transformational leaders enhance the motivation, morale, and performance of their subordinates by connecting their self-identity to the organization's mission and purpose. These leaders believe it is important to be inspiring role models who challenge followers and understand their strengths and weaknesses in order to properly delegate tasks (Burns, 1978).

Empirical support exists regarding the effectiveness of school principals who are transformational leaders (Hameiri & Nir, 2016; Quin et al., 2015; Yang, 2014). According to Quin et al. (2015), transformational leaders are particularly successful at improving student achievement via the ability to challenge others, inspire them, and create a shared vision among followers. Yang (2014) found that transformational leaders can facilitate school improvement by formulating ideas, generating shared vision, delegating power, and gaining credence among followers. Hameiri and Nir (2016) found that transformational leaders moderated the organizational health of schools and helped to counter negative external influences.

Transformational leadership is a preferred leadership theory for understanding the experiences of female African American leaders because, as argued by Murtadha and Watts (2005), most researchers find mainstream theories to be increasingly deficient for understanding leadership from the perspective of diverse cultural groups forced to struggle for social equality. The current researcher recognizes that female African American principals represent a subset of African American educational leaders for whom the intersecting factors of race and gender cannot be ignored. Transformational leadership theory seek to link social change with the reality presented by an organizational structure. While transformational leadership implies exerting influential behavior, it also implies dependence and connection (Murtadha & Watts, 2005).

Transformational leadership theory embraces the common objective of instituting college good by facilitating productive political, economic, and social relationships. Leadership responsibilities are often affected by circumstances of racial and gender discrimination. Because female African principals serve from an administrative call, it is expected that their professional environments and personal identities may affect their experiences. Transformational leadership theory emphasizes the centrality of experience and a critical reflection on experience (Mezirow, 1999), making it appropriate for the current study.

**Social cognitive career theory.** The current study sought to provide an understanding of the career pathways of African American women who become principals of public elementary schools. Social cognitive theory falls under the post-positivist umbrella of theories. The theory is based on the assumption that humans have unique mental capacities that other species lack. As a theory with post-positivist based goals, ontology, epistemology, and axiology, social cognitive theory is based on positivism, which is the belief that knowledge can only be gathered through the scientific method, via assessments that are empirical, measurable, and observable (Miller,

2005). Post-positivist theories can be used to explain, predict, and control. Bandura's (2003) Bo-Bo Doll study demonstrates the post-positivist epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions of social cognitive theory (Hanson, 2017). In the Bo-Bo Doll study, Bandura found that children exposed to violence were more prone to committing violent acts on the doll because they had been previously exposed to acts of violence. In this example, the goal of Bandura's study was to explain, predict, and control what would happen after children were exposed to violence (Bandura et al., 2003; Hanson, 2017).

Researchers use social cognitive theory to understand the association between peoples' mental cognitions and their experiences. The ontology of a post-positivist theory, such as social cognitive theory, is the belief that human behavior can be systematically predicted and examined. In the current study, it is assumed that female African American principals are predictable in that their experiences are based on expected circumstances.

The epistemology of a theory describes how a researcher feels or believes that knowledge is formed or expanded. Social cognitive theorists believe that an individual's knowledge can be expanded through observation (Bandura, et al., 2003; Hanson, 2017). In the current investigation, social cognitive theory allowed for an examination of whether female African American teachers' experiences were influenced by race- and gender-based experiences in their professional settings.

Finally, the axiology of a theory describes perceptions of the roles of personal values in research and theory. As a post-positivist theory, social cognitive theory emphasizes the importance of preventing personal values and interpretations from affecting the science of research. The focus of research is the views of participants, not those of the researchers (Bandura, et al., 2003; Hanson, 2017).

Social cognitive career theory has been used in other studies to explain the career paths of individuals pursuant of leadership positions. For example, Ellis and Brown (2015) used social cognitive career theory to explain why individuals pursued leadership positions. The researchers found that individuals who had higher levels of high self-efficacy regarding their abilities to be successful leaders were more likely to pursue these positions (Ellis & Brown, 2015). Gündemir, Dovidio, Homan, and De Dreu (2016) also used social cognitive theory to emphasize the influence of organizational policies on individuals' self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and willingness to pursue to pursue leadership positions. In the current study, social cognitive theory is used to shed light on how female African American female principals overcame institutional racism and discriminatory organizational policies to obtain their professional positions, via self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and willingness to pursue this path.

### **Organization and Structure of the Study**

This research study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the research process, including the background of the study, problem and purpose statements, research questions, the significance of the study, definitions, and the theoretical framework. Thus, Chapter 1 set the research focus and direction. Chapter 2 consists of a literature review designed to examine existing research related to school leadership, especially among African American women working as principals in elementary schools. The chapter also highlights existing gaps in knowledge that are addressed in the current investigation. In addition, Chapter 2 provides greater detail regarding the study's theoretical framework.

In Chapter 3, methods for the current study are presented. The methodology chapter is one of the most important chapters of a research study because it explains the strategies, approaches, and methods that will be used to complete study objectives. Study results will be

presented in Chapter 4, after data collection and analysis has occurred. The discussion related to the findings of this research with the findings that are presented in the literature review. Finally, Chapter 5 includes a discussion of study conclusions and recommendations. This chapter is used to discuss the achievement of study objectives and the influence of methodological decisions on those objectives. The last section of the chapter relies on study findings to provide pertinent suggestions regarding the pathways used by female African American principals of elementary schools to obtain their positions. Recommendations are provided to help stakeholders deal with the unique challenges faced by this demographic of school principals. This final part of the study includes a compilation of the resources and materials that have been used to complete this research study. The resources and materials included journals, books, credible websites, and other periodicals.

### **Summary**

This research study was designed examine the career pathways of African American women who become elementary school principals in urban settings. This chapter provided the study background and details of the problem, purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, and study organization. The next chapter provides a review of relevant scholarship.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a review of existing research related to the school leadership experiences of female African American principals of elementary schools. The chapter also includes additional research related to the study. Finally, Chapter two provides a discussion of the theoretical framework that will guide this study.

### **Career Paths**

When attempting to understand the experiences of female African American school principals, researchers have expressed a general concern with the career paths of these individuals. According to Herring (2007), school districts began hiring female teachers during the mid-19th century. The hiring of female teachers motivated women to invest in education and choose careers in education. Herring argued that the pursuit of careers in education prepared women for public leadership roles such as superintendents. However, notably, Bogotch and Shields (2013) revealed that school leadership positions are still currently dominated by men.

According to Ortiz (as quoted in Gales-Johnson, 2013), the career paths of most female African American educational leaders follow from positions as teachers, to principals, to central offices, to the superintendents. Fuller, Young, and Orr (2007) also tracked the career paths that principals followed and discovered that the paths of men and women varied significantly.

Women who aspired to become principals had an average of 10 years of experience in education, indicating that women often wait longer to pursue principalships than do men.. The researchers also noted that over 85% of school principals had previously held positions as teachers, indicating that most of the school principals were promoted from positions as teachers. Evidently, teachers who wanted to become principals were better situated to become principals

than individuals without teaching experience (Fuller et al., 2007). Whether this scenario is true for African American female public elementary school principals is a matter that requires a further investigation.

According to Fuller et al.'s (2007) North Carolina study, the number of female principals is significantly lower than the number of male principals, despite the sharp increase in the number of female administrators between 1990 and 2000. During this period, the number of female principals increased from 26% to 47% (Fuller et al., 2007). With respect to stability, the researchers found that less than 50% of newly-recruited principals stayed in their positions for more than 6 years. Study findings also indicated that a mere 18% remained at the same school for 6 years. Fuller et al. contended that despite a significant amount of research on the careers of school principals, information on principal career pathways is limited, especially regarding the mobility of leaders who enter the profession.

Loder (2005) also examined the career paths of female African Americans principals and found that even when opportunities existed for these women to become school principals, few were interested in pursuing the positions. Reluctance among these women persisted even after being encourage to pursue the positions by retired female African American women principals who provided them with training and responsibilities. Some of the candidates felt that they could not handle the persistent institutional and covert racism, sexism, poverty, and inequality. One participant in Loder's study had been a teacher for more than 30 years and was tasked with increasing responsibilities until her promotion to an assistant principal. Not long after the promotion, she was promoted to the position of a principal. Some of the pathways to principalship may begin with being a teacher, to an assistant principalship, and then to the principalship.



Ramsey (2008) argued that the career path of a female African American teacher to principalship sometimes begins with the confidence of an existing female principal who assigns administrative tasks to her. In this regard, as an existing principal is promoted, she is likely to recommend a teacher to fill her role. In many cases, principals may select and groom teachers to fill these positions as assistant principals, and eventually, main principals.

While engaging in the discussion about administrators of educational institutions, many researchers have explored the career obstacles that female African American principals experience. For example, Prescott-Hutchins (2002) conducted a study on the career path experiences of 14 African American women who served as school principals in the State of Georgia. The study was designed to assess the lived experiences of principals regarding their career challenges and obstacles. Results indicated that principals faced challenges that hindered their vertical mobility. In addition, the researcher found that the women faced obstacles regarding requisite degrees, the satisfaction of certification conditions, and unfair performance evaluations – all of which slowed their professional progress. Prescott-Hutchins further established that the women principals experienced discrimination intended to impede their paths toward principalship. Despite these findings, it is unknown whether female African American principals in urban elementary schools experience similar barriers. Research in other settings might provide additional insights into career pathway experiences to principalship among African American women.

In another study, Humphrey (2007) examined the career paths and development of male African American high school principals and found that their career paths were influenced by personal background, professional background, and the role of learning factors. In addition, findings suggested that one's aspiration and confidence to become a principal are fundamental to

a successful path to the career. However, Humphrey did not specifically examine individuals' career path challenges or strategies employed to overcome such challenges.

London and Greller (as Quoted in Humphrey, 2007) reported that studies on women's career paths are limited after the 1970s, especially studies focusing on African American women. According to Humphrey (2007), a resurgence of such studies occurred in the 1990s. Humphrey reported that the career aspirations of female African American teachers were three times greater than aspirations of their White counterparts, though the study did not focus specifically on career paths to principalship. Therefore, further research is needed to bridge the gap.

Humphrey (2012) also undertook another investigation on the lived experiences of African American women who followed the career pathway of student affairs representatives to presidents of community colleges. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews among 10 participants and found that the lived experiences of the women leaders were influenced by factors such as personal pillars, advice from mentors, profession-related factors, the pathways of student affairs chosen, and professional challenges. Importantly, Humphrey did not explore each of these factors in detail, making it difficult to determine the extent to which such factors influenced the women's career pathways.

## **Theories**

Aside from existing research on the career paths that African American women follow to obtain positions as principals, a few theories exist to explain the factors that influence the career paths of these individuals. One such theory is Holland's theory of vocational personalities and work environments. The central tenet of this theory is the role of counseling psychology in individuals' career decisions (Nauta, 2010). Proponents of the theory argue that most people display a combination of six types of personalities, including enterprising, conventional, social,

realistic, investigative, and artistic (Nauta, 2010). Each of these types is associated with an assemblage of personal interests, abilities, preferred activities, values, and characteristics (Stitt-Gohdes, 1997). According to Stitt-Gohdes (1997), Holland believed that personality evaluations are useful for determining individuals' career paths. The implication of this theory is that career counselors can use personality indicators to offer career path advice.

Another relevant theory is Parson's Trait Factor Theory of Occupational Choice. Parsons is considered a pioneer in the vocational guidance movement. Parsons developed a talent-matching approach that became the Trait Factor Theory of Occupational Choice. The central tenet of this theory is the concept of matching talents (Careernz, 2015). Parsons believed that occupational decisions are made when individuals have achieved certain understandings of self (Careernz, 2015). First, a person must have a precise understanding of his or her personal character traits, such as interests, capabilities, and attitudes. Second, an individual must understand the labor market and type of jobs that are currently available to them. Finally, individuals must make sensible and objective judgments to identify links between their personal character traits and the labor market (Careernz, 2015).

Notably, many other theories exist to explain factors that influence individuals career paths and choices, including socioeconomic theory, Super's theory and decision-making theory. The current study sought to provide an understanding of the career pathways among female African American elementary school principals.

### **The Role of the Principal in Urban Elementary Schools**

A number of scholars have examined the roles of principals in urban elementary schools. White-Smith (2012) acknowledged that principals in urban elementary schools are essential to effective school operation. White-Smith further noted that there are many reasons for any given

school to be less or more successful in educating students. School principals play a major role in student success, and the success of schools depends on how principals and teachers handle academic issues and address the academic needs of individual students.

According to White-Smith (2012), effective and competent principals must create a school-wide vision based on a commitment to high standards and the educational success of all students. Thus, school principals must be concerned with student performance. Contributing to this discourse, Greenhalgh and Lowry (2011) argued that career success has become very important in the global economy and depends strongly on education. The researchers acknowledged that to enable global competition among all U.S. sectors, the academic achievement gap between privileged and underprivileged students must be reduced. Chambers and Huggins (2014) contended that school principals are responsible for addressing these disparities in student achievement. Similarly, Tate (2012) argued that to reduce such disparities, school principals must emphasize academic success for all students. Other researchers (Reed, 2014; Terzi, 2010) contended that one of the most effective strategies for reducing the disparities between privileged and underprivileged students is to set high academic standards for *all* students.

Reed (2014) argued that principals are integral to the creation of learning environments that foster education. The researcher believed that school principals are responsible for creating school environments that nurture learning in all their daily activities. Hardman, Drew, and Egan (2013) described such an environments as characterized by safety and organization. Wilson (2013) added that such environments should be those in which teachers and other stakeholders are responsive and supportive toward students. These foregoing arguments imply that principals,

as leaders of the schools, are responsible for the creation of environments that are conducive to student success.

Sergiovani (2012) stated that principals should also work to collaborate with parents and the surrounding communities. In this respect, school principals or administrators, including those working in urban areas, should engage parents, guardians, and other external, immediate school communities to ensure the success of schools and students. The roles of principals are not limited to the performance of students but should include collaboration with other stakeholders, such as parents and local community members.

Sharp and Walter (2012) argued that the United States can only have excellent schools if it also has excellent leaders, recognizing that principals are essential to the creation and maintenance of successful schools. Sharp and Walter argued that the responsibilities of urban school principals include supervision of staff members, interaction with students, discipline of students, and collaboration with families and local community members. According to Tomal and Schilling (2013), principals must also manage school facilities, assist with curriculum development, and administer school budgets. When examining the roles of principal in urban elementary schools, Moos et al. (2011) revealed that greater turnover among elementary school principals occurred in populations that are more diverse and in schools with greater student transiency. In this regard, research indicates that parents and students in schools with high principal turnover often report a state of disorder and poor student discipline (Moos et al., 2011; Tomal & Schilling, 2013).

Dukakis and Portz (2015) concurred that principals are the most senior leaders in their schools. Thus, principals cultivate leadership in others and are accountable for the educational standards of their schools. There is a long-standing consensus among leadership theorists that

leaders of all types of organizations, including urban elementary schools, must rely on others to achieve the missions and visions of their respective organizations. In addition, leaders must foster leadership development throughout members their organizations (Wilson, 2013).

Likewise, Okafor (2012) and Reynolds et al. (2014) reported that principals who receive positive remarks from teachers for the creation of positive learning environments receive positive appraisals for creating and enhancing school leadership.

### **African American Females in Education**

African American women serving in schools, especially public elementary schools, have been involved in educational leadership despite challenges associated with gender and race. Before the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans faced significant barriers to education and literacy (Becks-Moody, 2004). Despite these challenges, individuals like Mary McLeod Buthune and W. Dubois overcame the odds and went on to educate themselves and others (Becks-Mood, 2004). According to Becks-Moody (2004), as the Civil War ended, African Americans were provided with opportunities to seek education. African American women were instrumental in the education of African Americans, often doubling as school proprietors and administrators (Becks-Mood, 2004). McCarthy (2007) and Kleber (2015) supported this claim by relating that African American women who were both proprietors and administrators acted as role models and mentors to African Americans seeking education in the post-Civil War United States.

Robinson (2012) examined the lived experiences of African American women who had obtained senior school leadership positions in schools dominated by White Americans. The researcher found that concepts such as leadership preparations and perceptions of race and gender significantly influenced the career pathways of these women, especially paths that led to

principalship. African American women must confront a number of issues related to gender, race, and preparedness to lead, especially in the context of public elementary school leadership.

Despite the number of African American women who hold school administrative positions, literature indicates these women face many professional challenges. For example, Clayborne (2006) found that the pathways to leadership among African American women is often wrought with the experiences of marginalization and inadequate mentoring. In this regard, Menchaca (2010) defined marginalization as a form of social exclusion whereby a group or social class is relegated to the fringes of society. According to Tillman and Scheurich (2013), race- and gender-based marginalization of African American women can create feelings of exclusion and poor support, impeding pathways to leadership careers. However, the extent to which this argument is true with respect to African American women principals working in public elementary schools represents a research gap that will be addressed in the current study.

Shoho and Barnett (2010) conducted a qualitative study of 62 newly-promoted principals. Their researchers aimed to examine the challenges that principals encountered, how actual challenges compared to the expected challenges, and what the principals' long-term career aspirations were. Results indicated that some of the challenges principals encountered were related to instructional leadership, managerial problems, and community issues. The researchers also reported that the job expectations of one new principal were influenced by her experiences as an assistant principal. Surprisingly, the study revealed that only a few of the participants expected to have long-term careers as school principals. Finally, results indicated that new principals were interested in moving into district-level positions within 10 years. Evans (2009), who advanced arguments on the career pathway to principalship, has confirmed the challenges reported by Shoho and Barnett.

Even though all leaders within educational institutions face numerous challenges in terms of achieving success, Jean-Marie (2013) argued that female African American principals often face unique challenges associated with the complexities of gender, race, and age. Jean-Marie (2013) examined the experiences of a sample of female African American principals who successfully dealt with career barriers and found that the major challenges included dealing with ageism, sexism, and racism. These challenges confirmed the arguments of the other researchers, but Jean-Marie (2013) specifically studied African American women. However, it is still important to examine whether these same challenges and barriers define the experiences of female African American principals of public urban elementary schools.

### **The Historical Perspective**

This section contains a historical examination of education in the United States. In this case, the experiences of female African American principals can be examined from a historical perspective. Two periods are essential to this examination: (a) the period before the case of *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* with the ruling in the case of *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) (Klein, 2014), and (b) the period after Brown's case. It is important to begin by focusing on the pre-Brown case (Klein, 2014). Generally, the tradition of excellence and among African Americans dates back to the 1860s. According to Klein (2014), African American educators during the pre-Brown period played a significant role in the building and operation of schools. African Americans were also essential to securing funding and other necessary resources to promote education for African Americans (Klein, 2014).

According to Klein (2014), the educational philosophies of African American educators reflected a collective African American belief in the importance of education for the development and betterment of children. Klein (2014) noted that African American schools and



educators encourage community values and are definitive cultural symbols of the African American community. During the pre-Brown period, separate school systems existed for African Americans and White students, due to segregation within the school system (Klein, 2014). Segregation in public schools was legalized with the Jim Crow laws, which encouraged segregation in public places, including schools. These laws were affirmed in the case of *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896). Prior to this case, the State of Louisiana passed a law requiring separate accommodations for Whites and African Americans. On behalf of himself and other minorities, Plessy sought a repeal of these laws, but the court ruled that the segregation of public facilities was legal to the extent that White and African American facilities were equal to each other. This ruling meant that segregation in public schools would continue for as long as it was recognized by the law.

Notably, African American educators also served as role models for African American children. School administrators were also African Americans, so they were already becoming leaders and school administrators in the pre-Brown period. According to Lomotey (2010), prior to the *Plessy v Ferguson* case, White schools were perceived to offer better quality education than schools in African American communities. The ruling in the case of *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) affected numerous cases for African American educators. For example, in Topeka, Kansas, Linda Brown, an African American child, was forced to walk about a mile through a railroad switchyard to catch a bus to her all-African American elementary school, even though a White elementary school was just seven blocks away from her home (Lomotey, 2010). Oliver Brown, the father of Linda, unsuccessfully tried to enroll her in the White elementary school and then sued for the abolition of segregation (Lomotey, 2010). The Supreme Court unanimously held that race-based segregation of children was a violation of the

U.S. Constitution (Lomotey, 2010). This ruling provided a new opportunity for desegregation in U.S. public schools (Lomotey, 2010).

The ruling in *Brown v Board of Education* ushered in a second period that is useful for examining the experiences of female African American educators and school administrators (Lomotey, 2010). After the ruling, many African American educators lost their jobs. According to Lomotey (2010), many African American principals of elementary schools were demoted or fired, with race perceived as a plausible culprit. Consequently, African Americans were discouraged from pursuing careers as school administrators (Lomotey, 2010).

The loss of jobs among African American educators and principals was reversed after enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The enforcement of these Acts resulted in incremental changes that favored African American teachers and school administrators (Lemasters & Smith, 2010). After the passing of these two Acts, African Americans were more likely than Whites to be hired as principals, due to expectations of racial equality in the schools. However, Lomotey (2010) noted that the impact of the Brown's case ruling discouraged many African Americans from pursuing administrative careers; thus, there were not enough African American principals to hire (Lomotey, 2010).

According to Townsend and MacBeath (2011), African American principals have used their historical experiences to create school environments that are conducive for student learning. With the encouragement of school integration, researchers claim that African American principals are important for helping African American students understand their cultural backgrounds and helping White students understand the historical experiences of African Americans. The assignment of African American principals to urban elementary schools can promote racial and gender equality. Further, it seems that these arguments constitute some of the

reasons why female African American principals are likely to stay in urban elementary schools for considerable periods (Townsend & MacBeath, 2011).

### **Challenges Faced by African American Women in Leadership**

William (2007) examined a number of studies and found that African American women in leadership positions, especially in the leadership sector, experienced many professional challenges. Johnson-Jones (2009) and Hornsby (2008) contended that African American women who aspire for leadership position are challenged by gender- and race-based issues, a claim that was supported by Acheampong (2009). Acheampong added that female African American principals tend to face many challenges, including gender discrimination, in their leadership role in Catholic schools in the 21st century. Further, according to Acheampong (2009), the history of African Americans in the United States has imposed a permanent mark on their race with regard to their ability to lead or occupy leadership positions. The implication of the researcher's argument is that racial discrimination is one of the most significant obstacles that female African American leaders have faced. Few researchers have examined the ways that school principals have overcome racial and gender discrimination against them (Townsend & MacBeath, 2011).

Loder (2005) described how an intergenerational sample of 20 African American women in Chicago created meaning out of their fights to climb professional ladders into position as principals. According to the researcher, African American women perceived their experiences and explained their journeys to becoming school principals in terms of whether they were born before or after the Civil Rights Movement. According to Loder (2005), African American women born before the Civil War explained their journeys to principalship as progress, while those born after the Civil War considered their journeys to be ones of choice or passion.

In another related study, Sanchez-Hucle and Davis (2010) studied the challenges that women, especially those of color, faced during the quest to achieve leadership roles. The researchers discussed the barriers and challenges that women face, including those based on race or gender. Findings supported those reported by Loder (2005). The arguments presented by Sanchez-Hucle and Davis were supported by Jean-Marie (2013), who identified race and gender factors as barriers to the success of earlier female African American principals.

Beck-Moody (2004) conducted a study to explore the various challenges faced by female African American administrators in public education. The researcher used Black Feminism and five dimensions as the framework of the study. The five frameworks included core themes of a black woman's standpoint, variation of responses to core themes, interdependence of experience and consciousness, consciousness and the struggle for a self-defined standpoint, and, finally, interdependence of thought and action.

During the study, Beck-Moody (2004) used qualitative method to study 10 female African American administrators in public educational institutions in Louisiana. According to the researcher, the study yielded 10 main themes with regard to obstacles to the progression of African American women's careers in school administration. The researcher cited a number of obstacles, including spirituality, balancing of family and career, the lack of an adequate family support system, racism, sexism, the lack of respect from peers and colleagues, lack of mentoring programs, isolation and underrepresentation, competency and confidence, professional satisfaction, and community consciousness.

Contributing to the research, Gardner, Barrett, and Pearson (2014) argued that despite literature stressing the importance of their presence in colleges, female African American administrators remain underrepresented in higher education. The researchers conducted a

qualitative study to explore the experiences and challenges of African American women who were successful school administrators in White-dominated institutions. Analysis revealed that the challenges were mainly associated with three factors: adjustment issues, institutional factors, and career dynamics. With respect to adjustment issues, the challenges included perceptions of prejudice and feelings of disconnectedness or variance at work. In terms of institutional factors, the challenges included the commitment to diversity, recruitment strategies, compensation, resource availability, and work environments. Regarding career dynamics, the challenges included professional preparation and undergraduate involvement in student matters. It is important to note that not all three categories of obstacles apply to all female African American principals.

### **Challenges of Working in High Poverty Schools**

A number of researchers (Charner-Laird et al., 2016; Comber & Woods, 2016; Paille, 2014; Simon et al., 2013) have commented on the professional pressures associated with working in high poverty schools. The provision of equal opportunity in education requires that the quality of public schooling be similar for all students (Baker, 2016). Equal educational opportunity includes similar quality in teachers and principals for economically advantaged and disadvantaged schools. Additionally, obtaining equal educational outcomes requires greater effort from principals and teachers in high poverty schools because underprivileged students have fewer resources at home, which affects their academic achievement and must be compensated by the schools (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2007; Harris, 2007). As such, this places greater pressure on principals and teachers working in high poverty schools.

The development and learning of students in high-poverty schools is affected by many factors, including conflict, illness, fear, anger, and hunger (Parrett & Leverett, 2012). When

students are afraid, tired, and hungry, they are less receptive to learning, regardless of the resources available to them. Students in high-poverty schools may demonstrate learning gaps due to high rates of absenteeism and frequent changes in schools (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006). Thus, teachers and principals working in high-poverty schools must understand the effects and extent of student poverty. Inadequate knowledge about poverty may prevent teachers and principals from appropriately understanding and responding to student behavior, creating professional challenges (Sass, Hannaway, Xu, Figlio, & Feng, 2012). Teachers and principals in high-poverty schools must respond to varying levels of student needs while working with limited resources. Inadequate knowledge about the equitable school resource distribution can negatively influence student outcomes (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013). In order to be successful, teachers and principals in high-poverty schools must be accountable for the school environment as well as student outcomes (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006), placing enormous pressures on these professionals.

Beyond the resources and time demands placed on teachers and principals in high-poverty schools, another challenge is the inconsistency that often exists between the backgrounds of the students and the teachers (Simon et al., 2013). This gap has increased along with growing student diversity while the backgrounds of teachers have remained relatively unchanged. According to a report (Casey, Carlo, Bond, & Quintero, 2015), minorities are underrepresented among teachers, leading to large gaps between students of color and teachers of color. A decline in the share of African American teachers has occurred in nine major American cities. Casey et al. (2015) noted that the cause of the decline was the result of poor working conditions. African American teachers and principals were found to be more motivated to work with students in high-poverty schools.

African American students are most likely to be students in high poverty schools. According to National Equity Atlas (2016), 42.62% of African American students attended high-poverty schools. Similarly, African American educators are most likely to be hired in high-poverty schools, which is likely due to their cultural sensitivity toward African American students who comprise a significant portion of the student body in these schools. According to Toldson (2013), “Black students [are] less likely to perceive empathy and respect from their teachers and more likely to view the school as a punitive learning environment than white students.” As such, a consistent workforce of teachers with the competence to work with underprivileged and minority students may lead to better student outcomes in high-poverty schools.

Research indicates that hiring African American educators in high-poverty schools, can foster improvements in student retention, attendance, and standardized test scores (Berliner, 2014; Grant, 2014). Further, African American teachers are more likely than White teachers to work and stay in high-poverty schools (Casey et al., 2015). Many African American teachers feel it is their duty to work in high-poverty schools and they are more likely to be personally committed to the positive outcomes of African American students (Harris, 2007). African American teachers are often motivated by humanistic commitments to improving life among students from high-poverty schools, especially by filling the cultural gap in the background of teachers and students that exist in many high poverty schools (Parrett & Leverett, 2012). African American teachers also serve as major role models for students of colors in terms of their own ambitions for teaching. By providing minority students with an example of a career path, African American teachers may inspire them to become teachers themselves, ultimately increasing the number of African American teachers in the future (Parrett & Leverett, 2012).

**Preparation Programs**

Educator preparation programs are crucial in every educational system. Dodson (2014) examined the effectiveness of field experiences for preparing principals to undertake associated professional responsibilities. The researcher surveyed school principals to examine their preparations for future roles through the Principal Preparation Program (PPP) that each principal attended. Results indicated that most participating principals had completed field experiences as part of their preparation programs. According to the researcher, the principals reported that the field experiences were vital to helping them understand their principalship roles. Further, study results revealed that principals with practical, hands-on experience were more prepared for principalship positions than those who did not.

Other states have also developed different programs to prepare principals. For example, the State of Illinois changed its principal preparation programs based on previous studies (Vantuyle & Hunt, 2013). According to Vantuyle and Hunt (2013), educational institutions must prepare new administrators to replace the principals who retire or turnover. The researchers recommended a new standard of preparation programs that guarantees the competences and capabilities of new principals.

Because of the increasing complexities of the roles assigned to school principals, Lynch (2012) argued that preparation programs must account for and reconstruct philosophies and practices. Weiler and Cray (2012) also contended that since educational improvements are vital for future principals, educational leadership preparation programs must prepare principals to take on these future roles. In light of the foregoing arguments, Sanzo (2012) noted that the United States began providing funding in 2002 to develop and implement various principal preparation programs for aspiring and current principals and assistant principals. According to Sanzo, the



U.S. government supports such programs with the intention of building the capacities of aspiring and existing assistant principals and principals. Thus, it appears that the government is aware of the need to prepare individuals to assume the complex roles of principalship.

Principal preparation programs are also based on academic achievement. Gumus (2015) conducted a study on the requirements of becoming a school principal, focusing on the pre-service training of elementary and middle school principals. Results indicated that a master's degree in educational administration and a certificate in administration were vital to effective principal preparation programs. In addition, with respect to pre-service education, results revealed that internships and courses pursued during graduate studies were essential to the preparation of principals. However, research on the principal preparation of African American women would add to this knowledge base.

### **Elementary Education**

Elementary education is an important part of the American education system (Harmon & Jones, 2005). Educational oversight is conducted at state, departmental, and district levels. Every state has its own department of education. School districts are generally categorized into elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. Elementary schools are for kindergarten through fifth grade students (Candal, 2009). It is important to note that most school-age children begin kindergarten at the age of 5 years old. Notably, elementary school education is the main source of U.S. primary education (Candal, 2009). Elementary school is the initial stages of formal education that precedes secondary education (Candal, 2009).

The history of elementary education in the United States began with European settlers of the North American colonies during the 16th and 17th centuries (Fujikane & Okamura, 2008). Settlers created a two-track system of education in which students in the lower socioeconomic

strata went to primary schools while those from the upper socioeconomic strata attended separate schools (Fujikane & Okamura, 2008). These elementary schools provided students with a basic curriculum of arithmetic, writing, and reading (Fujikane & Okamura, 2008). Currently, there are public and private elementary schools. Teachers have to be certified by the state to teach in public elementary schools, and certification requirements often vary from state to state (Macpherson, 2012).

Elementary school principals are tasked with the administration of education in public and private schools (Sharp & Walter, 2012). Elementary school principals must possess management and administrative skills in order to effectively delegate educational responsibilities and communicate efficiently with students and teachers (Sharp & Walter, 2012). The most important responsibility of an elementary school principal is to foster high academic performance among all students, based on existing educational policies (Sharp & Walter, 2012). Such duties include mentoring elementary education teachers, disciplining students, and managing school budgets. The success of elementary schools depends on principals' abilities to perform their professional responsibilities (Michaux, 2011). Elementary school principals are also responsible for ensuring the implementation of mandated reforms to ensure the ongoing improvement of student education (Michaux, 2011).

### **Race and Gender**

Race and gender are significant factors that influence the career pathways of female African American principals (Mock, 2012). Research on the hiring practices of school leaders reveals that gender-based discrimination and racism still influence the hiring processes. Milner and Lomotey (2013) noted that in the context of aspiring principals programs and administrative

internships, a larger percentage of attendees are African Americans, although the representation of female African American principals is unclear.

Mock (2012) contended that race is the single most influential factor on the challenges and successes of African American principals serving in public elementary schools. In reference to issues of gender and race, Cabrera and Lonbaken (2011) described the problem as *gendered racism*, which creates a number of barriers that effect race and gender. Female African American principals face careers barriers because they are both female and African American.

Furthermore, female African American principals contend with systemic community prejudices against female authority figures (Smith, 2010). These prejudices comes against the backdrop of a male-dominated school leadership system that has largely discriminated against women (Smith, 2010). Therefore, community prejudices against female African American principals is a practice that has been long accepted throughout U.S. society.

Smith (2010) contended that cultural differences based on race and gender undermine community confidence in African Americans and women, in general. The problem becomes even worse for African American women, who are the targets of racial and gender prejudices.

Although the exhibition of female traits is a social norm for women, those expectations create barriers that foster community prejudices and impede the career progress of female African American principals.

### **Advanced Degree and Training**

The receipt of professional training and advanced degrees often define the career pathways of female African American principals working in elementary schools. Advanced training and education are important for school principals. In this respect, much research exists on the career development of school administrators. Given the nature and demands of

educational leadership, there are specific elements of education and training that are essential for aspiring school administrators. Gotthiel (2013) examined the requirements for elementary school principals and argued that a crucial requirement is an undergraduate education. Often, the path toward becoming an elementary school principal commences with first becoming a teacher, a role that requires one to have an undergraduate degree in education (Gottheil, 2013). From there, teachers may advance themselves to become principals. According to Echaore-McDavid (2009), teachers who want to be principals must complete further training to meet all the prerequisites to become licensed elementary school principals. This training may involve short-term workshops or long-term programs (Echaore-McDavid, 2009).

After acquiring an undergraduate education, a teacher who aspires to become a school principal must obtain a graduate education, such as a master's in educational administration or educational leadership (Echaore-McDavid, 2009). Leithwood, Chapman, Corson, and Hart (2012) contended that effective elementary school principals must pursue continued education to stay abreast of emerging issues in education. Such training provides principals with management and administrative competencies and skills. Continued training may provide principals with other important skills, such as the abilities to communicate effectively, provide constructive criticism, and delegate tasks to others (Echaore-McDavid, 2009).

Apparently, the expectation of a degree and training requirements seem to be the same for every teacher or individual aspiring to become a school principal. A survey of the foregoing literature indicates that although teachers' careers may lead to a principalship, career paths to the position may differ. In addition, every state has different requirements as to the degree and training of principals.

## **Career Development**

Career development is not a one-time experience for principals (Day & Lee, 2011), but a continuous process. Principals need continuous career development, a process that requires adequate resources early in one's professional careers (Day & Lee, 2011). Benjamin (2006) contended that the quality of training is a significant challenge for principals and organizers of professional development.

Michaux (2011) argued that although career development is important for all principals, training should be tailored to the individuals and based on real-world situations that affect schools and students. Since training is important, Awotona (2014) argued that it should be extended over a relatively long period, suggesting that workshops that only last a few days may not adequately prepare principals to assume the responsibilities of school administrators.

Young, Crow, Murphy, and Ogawa (2009) posited that leadership training is one area that contributes to career development for principals. The researchers also contended that leadership training equips principals with the skills and abilities to effectively manage school operations. Young et al. suggested that principals have access to peers or professional cohorts to share ideas with their colleagues and learn from others in their professional networks. According to the researchers, access to peers allows principals to discuss their professional challenges and share solutions. Most importantly, newly-admitted principals need practical experiences as they transition from theoretical knowledge to practical application. By interacting with experienced principals, novice principals can learn and grow, professionally.

Although researchers have discussed elements of career development among principals and other school administrators, a dearth of scholarship exists on the experiences of school

principals working in public elementary schools. Therefore, there is a need for a specific study to determine and evaluate the experience of those principals.

### **Critical Race Theory on Career Pathways**

From literature reviewed in this chapter, it is apparent that race has a significant influence on the career pathways of African American school principals working in public elementary schools. Critical race theory is used within the academic discipline and is focused on the application of critical theory. Critical theory is a school of thought that emphasize the reflective evaluation and critique of the society, culture, and social processes via the social sciences and humanities (Brown, 2014).

The movement advocating the use of critical race theory is loosely unified by two common themes. The first proposes that white supremacy and racial power are long-standing that have been systematically facilitated (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The second theme entails the transformational link between law and racial power. In the context of the current investigation, the objective of critical race theory is to champion for racial emancipation. The theory also advocates for anti-subordination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical race theory first appeared in U.S. law school during the 1980s as a reaction to critical legal studies. Researchers, including Derrick Bell, supported the focus on race in civil rights scholarship (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). However, researchers were critical of the commitment of various Civil Rights scholars to color blindness and their emphasis on discrimination resulting from intentional actions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In their opinion, Civil Rights scholars should have focused on the conditions of racial inequality. Proponents of the critical race theory contended that civil rights scholars failed to give adequate attention to issues of racial domination and oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Critical race theory has been criticized on various grounds. According to some legal scholars, the theory relies heavily on narratives and storytelling, implying that critical race theory does not make use of empirical data and ignores the importance of logical argument or reasoning (Picart, 2013). In addition, the theory has been criticized on the ground that it tends to promote radical legal egalitarianism within society (Picart, 2013). Importantly, a focus on the elimination of racial discrimination and insubordination inadvertently advances the notion of incapability among minorities (Picart, 2013). Despite these criticisms, critical race theory has been widely-cited and is particularly relevant to the current study. Critical race theory was applied is useful for understanding of the pathways to principalship followed by female African American principals of public elementary schools. The theory is informed by the fact that race continues to be a significant indicator of inequality and discrimination in the United States.

In 1994, critical race theory was introduced into the education system to help explain different aspects of the U.S. educational system. Such aspects included how race was used to determine which principals were assigned to which schools, as well as the length of time a female African American principal were retained in a school. Since then, the theory has been used to critically analyze the U.S. educational system (Cole, 2009).

Critical race theory provides a valuable framework for highlighting issues of race and racism within the education system. The theory can be applied when investigating the pathways to principalship among female African American female working in public elementary schools. The persistence of racial discrimination within the U.S. educational system can be underscored by the fact that, even if the interests converge and result in effective racial remedy, the remedy is likely to be violated at the point of policymaking, especially if white supremacists believe that such a remedy is a threat to the perceived superior societal status of whites (Cole, 2009). In the

opinion of the researchers, the problem lies with decision-makers. Therefore, critical race theory is useful for exploring gender- and race-based career barriers among female African American principals working in public urban elementary schools.



### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretative research is to explore the experiences of African American women who achieved the principalship in urban public elementary schools, despite the oppressions of institutionalized racism. This chapter described the research methods to be used in the study and includes the research design, the rationale for the research study, the researcher's role, access and setting, the target population, methods of data collection, and the methods of data analysis.

#### **Interpretive Case Study Research Design**

The research design is the most critical aspect of a research study as it ensures that the data collected regarding a topic of study addresses all research questions. It is asserted that the research design of a study must be justified, as well as informed by the data collected, the data analysis techniques, the research questions under investigation, and a rigorous review of the literature related to the phenomenon being studied. Research designs of any study will influence the validity of conclusions, as well as recommendations established by the researcher from the study (Kothari, 2004). Thus, the research design of a study serves as a skeleton for the research process because it gives logical structure of the study instead of the logistical structure to be applied in the research. A justified and well-chosen design minimizes the likelihood of incorrect causal inferences and serves as the logical structure for this study.

This study utilized an interpretive case study research design. Case study, as a research design, has evolved in the past few decades into an important tool for undertaking qualitative research studies in various scientific disciplines. A case study research design involves the in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon in order to narrow down a wide field of research

interest into a single, easily researchable subject or topic (Yin, 2012). A case study approach has been chosen for this study because it can be used to conduct an in-depth investigation of a subject, while also testing the veracity of a research theory in a real world situation (Yin, 2012). According to Yin (2012), the use of a case study research design is appropriate when the focus of the study is to answer questions asking why and how. Consequently, given that this study sought answers to such questions, a case study is the most appropriate design.

Interpretivism relies on the assumption that people create and associate their own subjective as well as intersubjective meanings when they interact in an environment or with their surroundings (Keutel & Mellis, 2011). Consequently, interpretive researchers believe the world being investigated and themselves cannot be separated. Thus, they attempt to understand a phenomenon by assessing the meanings prescribed by to the participants to these. Interpretive researchers are aware of and embrace the fact that the data they gathered are in reality, their own constructions of other people's constructions of their perceptions and experiences in the world. For this particular study, the interpretative lens is taken because the researcher understands that African American female principals' experiences are their own and that to understand the phenomenon of African American female leadership amid institutional racism, these meanings prescribed to these experiences should be gathered or known (Keutel & Mellis, 2011). The researcher is also cognizant of the fact that the data to be gathered and presented was her own constructions of the principals' constructions of their perceptions of their experiences (Keutel & Mellis, 2011).

Urban centers are increasingly employing African American women as principals at public elementary schools. This scenario attracted the attention of the researcher, hence the focus on urban schools. The target population and the selection of the participants are important

elements to consider when undertaking a case study. The target population is comprised of all the individuals who can provide the intended information. Since interview sessions can take up time, and not all potential participants can be available, a selected few are usually involved (Bergman, 2008). In fact, involving all the possible participants can be uneconomical, time intensive, and can complicate the research process. Sampling techniques including simple random, multilevel sampling, and purposeful selection can be used in the research process. However, a purposeful selection was preferred in this study because of the need to collect accurate information, which can only be accessed by specific individuals.

### **Participant Recruitment**

A target population, in the context of a research study, refers to an entire group of individuals or subjects in whom a researcher is interested (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The members of such a group must have the characteristics for which a researcher is looking (Puhan, 2013). For the present study, the target population characteristics include, African American female principals working in an elementary urban school district, have worked in their current position for at least one year, and are willing to participate in the study. Even though the purpose of this qualitative, interpretative research is to explore the experiences of African American women who achieved the principalship in urban public elementary schools, despite the oppressions of institutionalized racism, the researcher did not make it an inclusion criteria for participants to have experienced institutionalized racism. Instead, institutional racism is assumed, as it has been reported by past studies and actual reports in general. If the participants did not experience racism in their personal experiences, this will materialize in their responses.

In terms of selecting participants for the study, a purposive sampling technique was used. This sampling approach is the most appropriate when a researcher deliberately selects

participants to provide him or her with specific information that may otherwise not be obtained when other techniques are used for participant selection (Oppong, 2013). In this case, the purposive sampling technique was used to gain an understanding of African-American women principals in public elementary schools in the contexts of theoretical and conceptual development (Oppong, 2013). Importantly, purposive sampling is largely used in the identification and selection of cases that are rich in the kind of information in which a researcher may be interested (Oppong, 2013).

By applying the purposive sampling technique, individuals with the characteristics required for participation were selected. Hence, the sample population for this study was African American women principals working in public elementary schools in an urban school district. The participants met the following criteria in order to be included in the study: African American female principals; currently working in public elementary schools; and have at least one year of experience as a principal.

In order to select the research participants, a list of all African American female principals working in public elementary schools and their contact information was obtained from the school district. The generated list provided information on all female African American principals with varying ages and years of experience in their positions. The principals were then contacted by phone or through email. At the point of contact, the researcher explained the nature and purpose of the study, and the roles the participants were asked to take in the process, should they volunteer to participate. The researcher worked to establish a rapport with the prospective participants in an effort to establish trust. Prospective participants were assured of complete confidentiality with respect to the information they provide to the researcher. The researcher also offered to share the results with the participants.

Five African-American female principals were interviewed for this research study. In particular, participants were five African-American female principals working in public elementary schools as they had firsthand perceptions and experiences on the subject being explored and investigated. Participants also had varying ages and years of experience (as long as at least one year) in their positions from five different elementary schools within the Southeastern urban school district. The researcher did not limit the age of the participants.

The setting of this research study were the public elementary schools in an urban area. Many African American women have worked diligently to achieve principalship as a career and there have been growing opportunities not just for African American women, but also for members of other minority groups.

### **Case Profile**

Ms. Booker is a seasoned elementary principal. She has been working in the district for a while. We do not work in the same achievement area and we have not been on any committees together. Her school is located in the southwestern area of town. Her school serves a large population of minorities and free-reduced lunch students. Her school is categorized as a Title One School.

Ms. Smith is a seasoned educator. I have worked with her on some committees but we are not in the same achievement area. Her school is located in a high minority/ high poverty part of town. Her school serves a large amount of monitories, free/ reduced lunch, and English Second Language students. Her school is categorized as a Title One school located in the west end part of town.

Ms. Jones is a new principal and new to elementary. Her previous work experience is in middle school education. We worked together for two months before I moved to another school. Her school is located in the west end part of town in a high poverty/ high minority area.

Ms. Snow is a seasoned educator. I have worked with her on some committees but we are not in the same achievement area. Her school is located in a high minority/ high poverty part of town. Her school serves a large amount of minorities, free/ reduced lunch, and English as a second language students. Her school is categorized as a Title One School.

Ms. Washington is a new principal who I haven't ever worked with before. Her school is located in the southwestern part of town. Her school is categorized as Title One. She was the assistant principal at her school and moved up to the principalship role in the same building.

### **Data Sources**

For this study, there were five sources of data: online survey, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, school artifacts, and district artifacts. The online survey were used to gain the participants' background information with regard their pathway and how they define their leadership. The interviews were used to achieve a deeper look at individual participants' experiences with regard to school, leadership and how they became the principal, and their participation in district supported programs.

The focus group discussions were used to confirm what they said and what resources were present as well as dive deeper into their experiences leading towards the principalship. More ideas about advocating, working and seeking out resources were expected to be revealed in a focus group discussion, where participants could hear similar participants share their opinions and experiences. The relationship between principal and district administrators were expected to be fleshed out better. Apart from conducting surveys, interviews, and focus

group discussions, school artifacts were gathered to supplement the data from the other instruments.

School artifacts included documents on the school's budget allocation, instructional practices/ programs, infrastructure and renovations. It includes determining whether the school has a system for the allocation of resources. The high poverty schools have insufficient resources and adhere less to local initiatives [mental health, behavior, attendance]. Artifacts were gathered to support and demonstrate these.

Lastly, district artifacts were gathered. The district artifacts included the district maps on hiring trends for minority principal placement, the grants and awards data on programs provided for African American principals, the demographic data on schools that the participants work for, and the district data on the number of African American women/men principals over the last five years. These artifacts were evaluated on trends of hiring AA female principals and assessing the hiring changes through the years. Evaluating these district artifacts was expected to confirm the participants' shared experience.

### **Analysis**

The data and information collected required an effective analysis to assist in drawing informed and knowledgeable conclusions. According to Yin (2012), data analysis in case studies often involve "examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study" (Yin, 2012, p. 109). Given that the data that was collected was qualitative in nature, including the survey data, interview data, focus group data, school data, and district data (map and hiring practices), the main goal of the analysis was to organize, then code, categorize the data into themes, and interpret the themes.

The interpretive analysis was used for analyzing the data gathered in this study (Hatch, 2002). This method was composed of eight steps. First, the researcher read the data to be familiar with it as a whole. Second, the researcher evaluated and reviewed impressions made in the past using field notes or memos. The third step entailed reading the data once more and identify impressions. The researcher noted all impressions made of the data. Next, the researcher studied the memos and make salient interpretations out of these. The next step was coding the data. The researcher read the data once more and deduced which statements could be coded as supporting or challenging the interpretations made. For this study, the survey, the interviews, and the focus group discussions were coded with attention to two theories of transformative leadership and professional pathway theories as the main consideration or guideline. The codes were then sorted and put under a rough theme, signifying they are related to each other under this one umbrella theme. The codes were categorized into several themes so that patterns can be developed from the data.

After this, the researcher drafted a summary. To ensure the credibility and reliability of the deductions or interpretations made, the researcher gave these to the participants for them to review. Necessary changes were made. The last step entailed the writing of the summary and determining experts that support the interpretations. After implementing this analysis method for the survey, interview and focus group data, the artifacts were read and re-read for the information that would support or counter the themes. The description was presented using phrases representing the responses of the informatics in a logical manner.

### **Transformational Leadership and Social Cognitive Theories as Analytical Tools**

As the main frameworks of this study, transformational leadership and social cognitive theories were used as analytical tools as well. Based on the transformational leadership theory



(Burns, 1978), transformational leaders influence change in their subordinates and social systems. At the same time, they are influenced by the productivity of the political, economic, and social relationships they facilitate. As established by past studies, leadership responsibilities are affected by circumstances of racial and gender discrimination. As African American female principals serve an administrative call, it is expected that their environment and identities can have an effect on their experiences. Transformational leadership theory emphasizes the centrality of experience, critical reflection and rational discourse in the experience (Mezirow, 1999; Taylor, 1998), making it appropriate for the current study. These assumptions were used for understanding and analyzing the responses of the African American female principals with regard to the process of becoming elementary school principals in a Southeastern, urban district and their experiences with educational institutions, communities and professional organizations.

To explain the career pathway process of becoming a principal, the explanation were informed by the social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). The social cognitive career theory is rooted from social cognitive theory by Bandura (1986), which emphasizes the role of cognition in manipulating the environment and influencing behaviors. Central to the role of cognition in affective behavior, the social cognitive theory particularly emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy in predicting the behaviors of individuals within a specific environment (Bandura, 1986). When applied to career paths, the assumption of social cognitive career theory is that the personal background and characteristics of individuals influence their self-efficacy, which then influences their career choices (Lent et al., 2002). The researcher used this theory for understanding the career paths of African American female elementary principals in a Southeastern, urban district.

**Researcher Positionality**

In this research, because an interpretive approach was used, the researcher's own subjective interpretations of the responses were considered and embraced. In qualitative studies, Speziale and Carpenter (2007), claimed that there is a need to put aside preconceived notions to achieve reliable data. Social processes that would at least keep the research process honest and fair and at the same time, enhance the quality of research should be considered (Norris, 1997). Researchers are called upon to view themselves in two ways or roles simultaneously: self as a researcher and self in relation to the topic. This is a necessary precondition so that biases can be accounted with basis. For some, it requires some deep introspection as well as analysis. For other researchers, a process that should be done both prior and during the research proper is bracketing. However, as this is an interpretive study, Schwandt's (1994) interpretative worldview values and embraces subjective interpretation while acknowledging that these interpretations are socially constructed and therefore, shaped by the researcher's own stand or position about the topic. Therefore, researcher's perspective within the research itself is given importance. For this study, the researcher utilized a coding system and anecdotal notes to supplement the analysis. The researcher also used triangulation, or using multiple sources of data to mitigate bias.

For this research, as an AA female elementary principal, the researcher could not say she was neutral. However, this was precisely why an interpretive approach was chosen. I believed this enabled me to be able to get their experiences better as they were more willing to share to someone they know and think is similar to them. The researcher understood what they are sharing about race and gender stories. The interpretations for this study came from an AA

woman in the same position who knew the content and context of what the participants were sharing and discussing.

The researcher was an AA elementary principal in the same district as the participants so she has attended the same professional development and conferences as them and even worked with some. As an elementary principal, she understands the challenges and importance of hiring effective staff members, trying to increase student achievement, build moral, and engage community support; which were all necessary to be an effective transformational leader. She also understands the educational arena and the pressures of high stakes testing accountability that can hinder one's path towards the principalship.

The researcher may have experienced the same work context and responsibilities from the shared vantage point of gender and racial identity but still had her own unique experiences. Throughout the study, the researcher was mindful not to assume that the participants all had experiences similar as hers, the researcher used an interview protocol and conducted member checking to avoid overgeneralization on my interpretations. Member checking is important to ensure the researcher "represented those multiple constructions adequately; that is, that the reconstructions that have been arrived at via the inquiry are credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities" (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 296). The researcher asked the participants to check my transcriptions before data analysis and then my interpretations after data analysis.

### **Research Questions**

The research study investigated the following questions:

**RQ1.** How do African American female experience the process of becoming elementary school principals in a Southeastern, urban district?

**RQ1a.** What perceived support systems did they find beneficial?

**RQ1b.** What perceived barriers did they encounter?

**RQ2.** How have African American female principals describe their experiences with educational institutions, communities and professional organizations?

**RQ2a.** How have educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations helped to support the career paths of African American female principals?

**RQ2b.** How have educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations hindered the career paths of African American female principals?

### **Data Collection Procedures**

**Instrumentation.** The five main instruments of this study are online survey, interview, a focus group, school artifacts and district artifacts. In case studies, the use of multiple instruments is essential in order to gain a broader and more comprehensive perspective of the phenomenon (Yin, 2012). According to Yin (2012), the use of multiple instruments is also practiced in case studies to triangulate the data to strengthen the findings.

The survey provided general background information about the participants. The interview provides information on the participant's thoughts and beliefs regarding African American women in leadership positions in urban educational settings. The focus group discusses perceived barriers, support systems, gender, and race. The interview schedule was based on the experiences and specific factors that directly or indirectly influenced the career paths of African American women principals working in public elementary schools.

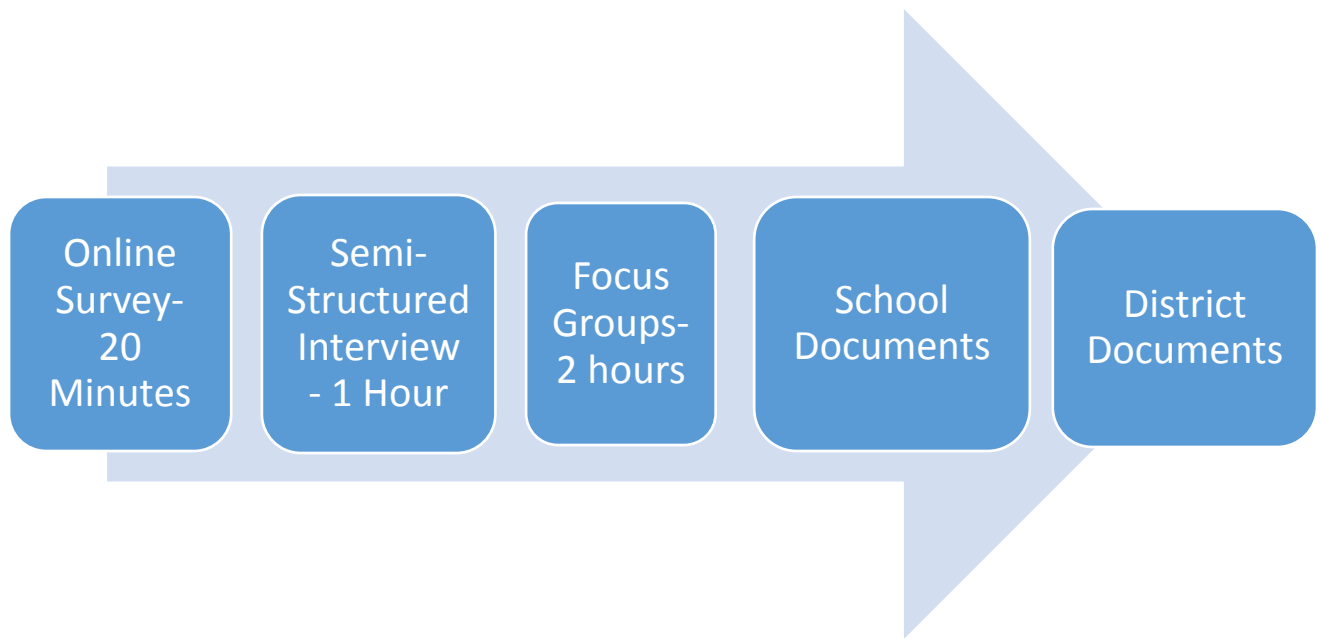
Semi-structured interviews were undertaken in the context of the study to provide authentic information from the perspective of the participant (Galletta, 2013). They allow for focused, two-way discourses between the researcher and the research participants. An

interviewer uses an interview protocol to guide the interview process (Galletta, 2013). However, majority of the questions that were posed to participants were constructed during the course of the interviews. One of the advantages of semi-structured interviews is that they enable a researcher to conduct an in-depth study of a phenomenon (Galletta, 2013). The district documents provide the relevant data on each of the participant's school. District documentation is important to be able to recognize and identify trends in principal placement, and principal progression.

Focus group discussions entail a process in which a moderator conducts a discussion among a group of individuals from whom data is collected (Hennink, 2007). A focus group discussion is a form of a group interview in which each of the participants provides his or her view on a subject of discussion (Hennink, 2007). A focus group discussion model is the best method when a study is interested in topics that cannot be studied through observational approaches (Hennink, 2007). It is most appropriate when the subject of study involves a sensitive topic such as the experience of African American women principals, especially through the lens of racial discrimination (Liamputtong, 2011). Finally, a focus group discussion is appropriate when a researcher wants to collect as much information as possible within a relatively short period of time (Liamputtong, 2011). For this study, the group discussions were used to confirm what they said and explore the topic further, such as barriers they experienced. Advocating, working and seeking out resources were expected to be revealed in a focus group discussion, where participants could hear similar participants share their opinions and experiences. The relationship between principal and district administrators would also be explored. Focus group interviews were used in this study to corroborate themes and findings, triangulate the data, and minimize threats to validity (Creswell, 2014).

My data was collected from March 2015 to June 2016. The online survey took only 20 minutes. Each of the interviews with the individual participants took an hour. The focus group discussion took two hours. Gathering of school documents took at least two hours while collecting district documents took five hours.

**Procedures.** The success of a research undertaking depends on how effectively a researcher collects and analyzes relevant data. The quality of the source of the data is a fundamental ingredient of a successful study. Triangulation of data, where various sources of the data are incorporated, assists in converging information from multiple perspectives (Young et al., 2009). In this case, the current research involved different forms of data in the interviews and document review. The methods combined various sources of information, hence enhancing the quality of the data and information from surveys, interviews, focus groups, and artifacts. Important to note is that the case study research design was applied to gather a deeper understanding of the women's experiences from the perspective of the participant. Figure 1 shows the five stage sequence of data collection method.



*Figure 1. Data Collection for Participants*

### **Online Survey**

Before the interviews can be conducted, it is important first to understand the background of the participants, to get an understanding of who they are and from where they came. These characteristics could provide possible information as to why responses in the interviews and focus groups are so. An online survey (Appendix A) in particular was used to gain the participants' background information with regard their pathway and how they define their leadership. The online survey was done on survey monkey, containing 16 questions. It focused on demographic information about the participants. It provided background on their career path, colleges, education, and leadership style, family, and their upbringing.

### **Interviews**

The purpose of the interviews was to collect information that improves the understanding of experiences of African American women who persevered in becoming principals in urban public elementary schools despite the possibility of oppressions of institutionalized racism. The interview contributed to a growing body of knowledge regarding the paths followed by the

African American females, in achieving their career objectives in terms of elementary principalship positions.

The interview progressed through a series of steps. I first gathered authorization for the research to take place then I mapped an interview schedule upon which the target participants, and the appointment dates and times were recorded (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). During the interview, I discuss again what was in the informed consent that all the participants signed before participating in this study. Once everything was confirmed, I started the interview, took written notes and recorded the responses with an audio-recorder. I used an interview sheet containing the questions, to ensure a consistent line of questioning that followed a systematic order.

Interviews were used as the primary data source in the study for four fundamental reasons. First, interviewing assists in extracting an understanding of the topic under study. In this regard, selected participants provide their point of view and opinions based on their experiences and expertise (Bergman, 2008). Secondly, the method is preferred because it is an open-ended approach, to which participants are free to respond to the questions in a wider perspective. Consequently, it becomes possible to access information from a wider perspective. Thirdly, a researcher can acquire deeper insights and feelings from the participants through facial expressions and body language. Lastly, the formulation of questions in different forms, and the diversity of ideas from the participants allows for triangulation of the obtained information. The interview questions that were used in the study were listed in Appendix B.

The interview questions centered on the participants' leadership style, career path, and educational support. Some of the interview questions were directly related to the survey questions, entailing the participants to expound on their answers. The interview questions were



selected and designed during the IRB process but I adjusted questions after the online survey for the individual interviews, and again before the focus group. Participants were able to share the obstacles and supports they experienced in their profession.

The selected participants engaged in the interview at their most convenient locations, particularly their offices. All interview sessions lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. At the interview initiation, the participants were reminded of the purpose of the study, the procedures followed, and the benefits. In addition, each respondent was informed of their right to withdraw from the interview at any point, as well as how confidentiality was enhanced. In an attempt to improve rapport and establish a sense of trust, the researcher provided personal contact information to the participants should they have any questions, so they can make contact by phone or e-mail. With an improved rapport, the participants were expected to feel free to discuss what they know or have experienced regarding the topic.

With the permission of the participants, the interviews were audio recorded. The transcriptions provided information that may have been overlooked during contemporaneous notetaking. Open-ended questions were used to provide an opportunity for participants to give detailed descriptions on their experiences. The questions encouraged the participants to elaborate and clarify their responses in a controlled manner. After completing the interview session, the transcription process started the next day.

### **Focus Groups**

After the interviews, a focus group was conducted. The first step was again to seek permission from the relevant authorities under which the target participants are employed. In this regard, the management/administration in the district public schools was requested to allow for the focus group to take place at their institutions. Subsequently, participant consent was obtained

prior to the focus group. The setting of the study was largely at the district schools from which the respondents were drawn. During the discussions, the researcher facilitated the questioning and allowed the participants to all share their responses. The discussions were used to delve deeper into their supports and pathways to the principalship. More ideas about advocating, working and seeking out resources might be revealed in a focus group discussion, when they hear other participants share their own opinions and experiences. The relationship between principal and district administrators were expected to be explored more in-depth.

### **School and District Artifacts**

The interview and focus groups were the primary source of information for the research study. However, document review of both school and district artifacts were gathered to serve as additional resources to strengthen the findings of the study. The documents involved were relevant, credible, and reliable to the topic (Creswell, 2013). In particular, I reviewed school documents to confirm programs, resources, and supports provided by the school. These are the school artifacts. With regard to the district artifacts, I looked at:

1. Grants and awards data on programs provided for African American principals
2. District maps on hiring trends for minority principal placement.
3. Demographic data of their schools
4. District data on the number of African American women/men principals over the last five years.

The district data were the district map and hiring practices of the district. Both types of artifacts were gathered in the expectation that they would be able to lend support to the interview with information about challenges of leading an urban school that was discussed during the interview and focus group. The documents provided an opportunity to triangulate data gathered

from the surveys, interviews, focus groups, and school documents (Yin, 2012). The documents collected can provide insights into the general trends of the principals within the school district in Kentucky.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Yin (2012), data analysis in case studies often involve “examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (Yin, 2012, p. 109). Given that the data that were collected were qualitative in nature, including the survey data, interview data, focus group data, school data, and district data (map and hiring practices), the main goal of the analysis was to organize, then code, categorize the data into themes, and interpret the themes.

The interpretive case study allows the researcher to be a key element in the data collection process, uses a combination of inductive and interpretive analysis, and focuses on the participant’s perspective to gain an understanding of their point of view (Hatch, 2002). The researcher is an African American female elementary principal working in the same district as the participants; this provides the researcher with understanding and familiarity of the district, professional developments, and experiences of the participants. As an African American female, the researcher is aware of the culture, the district that is represented, and the relationships between administration and central office staff. This information provides the researcher a sense of belonging and mutual understanding. The researcher’s background, experiences, and knowledge of the community provided access and connection to the participants. An interpretive case study is being used to create rapport with research participants, and to provide rich description that can be applied to patterns and general statements. Interpretive case study was used because interpretations was conducted from the data, links were made from the

interpretation, and the process focuses on creating meaning from the data that is deeper than just analytics (Hatch, 2002). The researcher want to give the participants a voice and understand the meaning of the data.

The data analysis began with an examination of online surveys. Inductive analysis emphasizes the process of using specific ideas and moving towards connections. Hatch (2002) states that inductive analysis uses specific pieces of information; which is pulled together to create meaning from the data. Intentionally searching for patterns from the data allows for general statements to be created from the specific pieces of evidence from the data (Hatch, 2002). The researcher was looking for significant ideas that presented themselves from the foundational questions that focused on career path, life history, background educational information, and leadership style.

The first phase of analysis identified similarities and connections to the church, community organizations, alternate certification programs, strong family connections, leadership styles, and historically black colleges/ universities attendance. The data analysis process is illustrated in four phases in Table 1 below. The researcher used inductive reasoning to categorize and review patterns of the data and to find meaning of the data. The findings were used to formulate the interview questions and provide more information about the participants. The semi-structured interview questions focused on career pathway supports which connected with family, church and community organizations. The purpose was to identify any similarities and have a deeper understanding of how these connections supported the participants through the principal career pathway.

The second phase analyzed semi-structured interviews in two different ways. The semi-structured interviews required the researcher to use a combination of inductive and interpretive

analysis. Inductive analysis was used for the themes that were identified. Inductive analysis focuses on finding important themes and ideas from the data and gathering all of the evidence together to create meaning (Hatch, 2002). Themes were identified by a coding system that was used with a tri-fold board and index cards. Then the themes were color coded and categorized. The color coding method revealed some overlapping among the categories. Balancing work and home, leading high poverty urban schools, and the pressure of barriers of trying to increase student achievement were the similar and overachieving challenges shared by participants. The purpose of this inductive analysis of semi-structured interviews was to identify themes and connections that focused on supports and barriers within the professional pathway to the elementary principalship. The participants shared stories of experiences, supports from their family, church, and community connections. This data collection allowed the researcher to ask additional questions during the focus groups about shared experiences with school demographics/ resources and supports connected from the participant's families, or community. Asking additional questions during the focus group that connected with stories experiences provided more information about the participants, their school, and leadership style.

An interpretive analysis of the semi-structured interviews provided additional meaning to information that was shared by the participants. Interpretative analysis focuses on impressions, statements, and themes that will lead to a more detailed examination (Hatch, 2002). Impressions, comments, observations and statements were used during the semi-structured interview process to capture the entire picture of the participants and provide more detail to the experiences (Hatch, 2002). These impressions and comments were used to formulate the questions for the focus group because there was a distinct difference of the supports, barriers, and leadership style between the new school principals and old school principals.

There was a clear connection that the perceptions were divided by the new-school and old-school principals on how you should attack, address, and handle challenges from the profession. During the semi-structured interview the participants referenced experiences that the participants and the researcher had in common in regards to principal experiences at meetings, hiring practices, and principal structures that need additional support. These data were used to connect the participant's perceptions on hiring practices, principal structures and experiences with the district documents. The participant's perceptions were that hiring practices, school resources/supports were based on infrastructures created by the school district; which the participants perceived as inequitable. The researcher used information from the participants to confirm where the majority of the minority principals worked, resources/supports provided for minority principals in high poverty schools. The focus group questions focused on leadership styles, leading urban schools, and challenges connected with the principal career pathway. These questions were direct connections to the online survey and the semi-structured interviews in the area of life experiences, leadership style, high poverty, and challenges of leading an urban school.

The third phase of the research was the focus group. With this phase, the researcher continued with inductive and interpretive analyses. The researcher continued with the same inductive analysis using the tri-fold board, index cards, and a color-coded system for identifying themes /categories. This inductive process led to clear themes on significant challenges and barriers that were common for all of the participants. There was a focus on staffing, resources, mental health, and poverty concerns when trying to lead an urban school; however there was a distinct difference on how the old school and new school principals addressed those barriers. The interpretive analysis allowed the researcher to see how many participants shared experiences

and different perspectives. During the interpretative analysis, anecdotal notes were made from the interviews to record impressions of the process and convey potential meaning and explanations from the participants' responses. Participants shared experiences and stories led to mentorship opportunities for the new school principals and old school principals.

The researcher used an inductive analysis to interpret and analyze the responses of African American principals regarding the process of becoming an elementary female principal in the Southeastern, urban, school district. The analysis also focused on experiences of these principals with educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations. Participants' life experiences, educational background, and educational programs informed the analysis of the career pathway process of becoming a principal. During the interpretative analysis, the researcher asked questions to determine influences on career pathway choices. Questions were asked to determine whether or not there are similarities, differences, or connections to the personal background and characteristics of leadership style. The analysis provided evidence that the new school and old school principal obtained the position of an elementary school principal differently, meaning that there was a variety of different jobs obtained before becoming a principal. There were several similarities on supports that were used to obtain the position. The interpretative analysis was used to gather understanding of the different career paths and transformational leadership used to obtain the position as an African American, female, elementary, principals in a Southeastern, urban district.

The final phase of the analysis was a typological analysis of school and district documents. With the typological analysis the researcher is going into the analysis with patterns, connections, and themes (Hatch, 2002). Hatch (2002) explains that typological analyses are done by separating the groups into predetermined typologies. The researcher has to provide meaning

and understanding from the typologies that render from the patterns and themes. With typological analyses the researcher determines if the predetermined patterns are substantiated by the data. School documents and district artifacts were used to verify and solidify the information shared by the participants on their perceptions about district systems, hiring practices, schools in poverty, district supports, and resources for principals in high poverty schools. After implementing these analysis methods for the survey, interview, and focus group data, the artifacts were read and reread for the information that could be used to support or counter the themes (Hatch, 2002).

Chapter 4 will be outlined in a systematic format that includes inductive, interpretative, and typological analyses. The data analysis will be represented through an outline and the headings will connect to the data examination of the online survey, semi-structured interview, focus groups, and district documents. The organizational structure will have an outline with headings that are in the same order as the data that were collected for interpretive case study. The data analysis used for the online survey was inductive analysis. Inductive analysis data will be represented using a “sandwich structure.” Hatch (2002) states that the sandwich structure occurs when the researcher explains how a theoretical point connects to the evidence in the data. The researcher then provides the evidence from the data that were collected. This order can be interchanged as long as the researcher explains the theoretical point evidenced in the data, demonstrates the data connection, and explains how the data are connected. The researcher will share the findings from each participants and then summarize the themes and findings at the end of the online-survey heading.

An interpretive analysis of the semi-structured interviews will involve the use of narratives. Hatch (2002) explains that interpretative analysis usually creates connections with



stories to communicate your data results. The semi-structured interviews will be written in narrative form without interruptions and then the interpretative analysis will be connected to the narrative and the literature. The narratives will go in order of each of the participant interviews. The researcher will share individual findings for each participants and then will summarize findings at the end of semi-structured interview heading. The focus group analysis will have a combination of inductive and interpretive analysis. The researcher will use a combination of “sandwich structure” and narrative analysis. The focus group analysis will start with narratives from each participants, then the researcher will connect the narratives to the evidence in the data, and then explain what the data shows. These themes will be summarized at the end of the focus group analysis.

The district artifacts will be examined with a typological analysis. With a typological analysis there is a specific focus on intentionally fact checking and verifying perceptions, generalizations, and data that participants have shared during the analysis process (Hatch, 2002). The researcher is going to select specific statements/ themes that the participants have shared that confirm their perceptions. The analysis will begin with an overview of patterns and relationships of all the findings to provide a better understanding of the themes. The findings will be structured around the generalization and themes. The generalizations will be the headings and the themes will be the subheadings. After each generalization is presented it will be explained and then supported by data. The data will be narratives shared by the participants during the online-survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus group. Then the narrative and district artifact data will be used to explain and connect how these generalization support the themes that have been identified. Lastly, literature will be connected the themes to solidify the findings.

Table 1

*Data Analysis*

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
The data analysis began with inductive reasoning to finding meaning in the data and the foundation questions at hand. This analysis was based on the online surveys.	Then the analysis focused on the semi-structured interviews. Inductive reasoning was repeated along with interpretive analysis.	The next phase focused on the research group through inductive and interpretive analysis.	The last phase used a typological analysis of the school and the district documents.
From this phase emerged similarities and connections to the church, community organizations, alternate certification programs, strong family connections, leadership styles, and attending Historically Black Colleges/ Universities (HBCUs).	Participants shared stories of experience and support. The supports and barriers mentioned where coding into themes.	There were many shared themes amongst the participants the following barriers emerged: staffing, resources, mental health, and poverty concerns. An interactive analysis was used to document impressions of the process and convey potential meaning.	The school documents and district artifacts were used to solidify information previously shared by participants. They were read to support or counter the themes.
	Themes were identified by a coding system of color-coded notecards placed on a tri-fold board to categorize into groups.		
	Connections were found between new-school and old-school principals using an interpretative analysis with anecdotal notes from the interviews.	The survey, interviews, and the focus group discussion were coded with attention to the theories of transformative leadership and professional pathway.	

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore the experiences of African American women who persevered in becoming principals in urban public elementary schools by focusing on the participant's perspectives to gain understanding with their perceived supports and barriers to the principalship career pathway. First, it will provide an understanding of the experiences that have influenced the career pathways of African American females who have become elementary school principals. Second, the study will explain dominant structures within educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations have supported and hindered the career paths of five African American female principals in public elementary schools. Third, the study will identify the support systems that these African American female principals in public elementary schools use to counteract perceived barriers to the principalship position. Fourth, some information will be generated from the study that will provide policymakers and school district stakeholder's additional information and supports to help African American female educators attain the position of principalship. The online interview, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and district artifacts in this interpretive case study allows the researcher to be a key element in the data collection process, uses a combination of inductive and interpretive analysis, and focuses on the participant's perspective to gain an understanding of their point of view (Hatch, 2002). The research questions that guided the study were the following:

**RQ1.** How do African American female experience the process of becoming elementary school principals in a Southeastern, urban district?

**RQ1a.** What perceived support systems did they find beneficial?

**RQ1b.** What perceived barriers did they encounter?

**RQ2.** How have African American female principals experienced educational institutions, communities and professional organizations influencing their career paths?

**RQ2a.** How have educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations helped to support the career paths of African American female principals?

**RQ2b.** How have educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations hindered the career paths of African American female principals?

Chapter four contains themes from the analyses of an online survey, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and district artifacts. The themes that have been identified from the analyses of the online survey included connections to spirituality, community organizations, alternate certification programs, strong family connections, leadership styles, and historically black colleges/ university attendance. The semi-structured interviews used a combination of inductive and interpretative analysis that focused on themes that connected to the online survey in the area of balancing work and home, leading high poverty urban schools, and the pressure of barriers of trying to increase student achievement. The participants shared stories of experiences, supports from their family, spirituality, and community connection. The analysis of the focus group provided evidence that life experiences, educational background, and educational programs informed the analysis of the career pathway to the elementary principalship. The analyses also provided evidence that new school and old school principal obtained the principal position with a variety of different jobs before becoming a principal; however, similarities on supports were identified from the participants.

**Results: Surveys**

The first data source used for this interpretative study was the online survey of five African American female principals. The online survey was used to gain the participants' background information with regards to their pathway and how they define their leadership. The principals' case profiles are presented before the results to better understand their perceptions and responses. Participant 1 was in her 10th year in education at the time of the interview. She taught five years as a middle school language arts teacher, three years as an AP, and currently in her second year as an elementary school principal. She also holds a Master's Degree in Secondary Education with a leadership license and is also a Doctoral Candidate. The participant considers her educational background as her formal preparation for the position, she also took two classes at a university to prepare her for her leadership role. She then classified her school as a focus school that needs improvement.

Participant 2 holds a principal certification and a Doctorate Degree in Professional Leadership in Education. The participant considers her certification and formal education as her preparation for her current leadership role. Through her preparation programs, she learned about the importance of effective teaching and learning; however, she expressed that the training would have been better with the inclusion on how to effectively manage people.

Participant 3 has been in the Public Education sector for over 23 years during the time of the interview, and a principal for 17 years. She completed her Master's in Early Childhood Education and earned her Principal Certification from a university in the Southeastern area. For Participant 3, the Principals for Tomorrow as well as an intern experience best prepared her to lead an urban elementary school that focused on the issues of equity, poverty, and diversity. This participant identified her school as a focus school.

Participant 4 received her Master's in Administration, was a principal intern, and eventually acquired the job as principal. The participant completed her Master's at a university in the Southeastern area. She admitted that she did not take any classes on diversity, equity, and poverty; however, Principals for Tomorrow became her key leverage and learned much of her knowledge and skills. Finally, she also classified her school as one that needs improvement.

Participant 5 identified herself as a "41-year old African-American woman" who has been in the education sector for 12 years. She had several roles before becoming a principal, she was initially a social worker, classroom teacher, and assistant principal. For her education training as a principal, she believes that the most beneficial was her Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership from a university in the Southeastern area. Further, she also earned an Administrator/Principal Certification at university in the Southeastern area as well as a Level 2 training at another university in the Southeastern area.

The first research question, inquired about the experiences of African American females who have become elementary school principals in terms of their support systems, the results of the surveys identified that the female African American principals had similar connections with their family, spirituality, leadership style, alternate certification programs, and historical black colleges/universities attendance. Encouragement was given by the formal programs that they enrolled in and their own family members. Having a strong support system is what all the participants shared that is needed to be successful in the principalship. The participants categorized the support systems to be relationships that have been created either with family, faith, or relationships built from people in the alternate certification programs and college/universities. For the second sub-question under the first research question, it was found that the principals already expected that barriers would be present in urban schools; however,

they were unsure on how to handle the challenges that arise when leading an urban school. Participants shared they already prepared themselves for the challenges that will come with leading high poverty schools by having a strong family support system and a spiritual focus to keep them grounded. Throughout the online survey participants shared how their spiritual faith and family support helped them overcome the obstacles in their career.

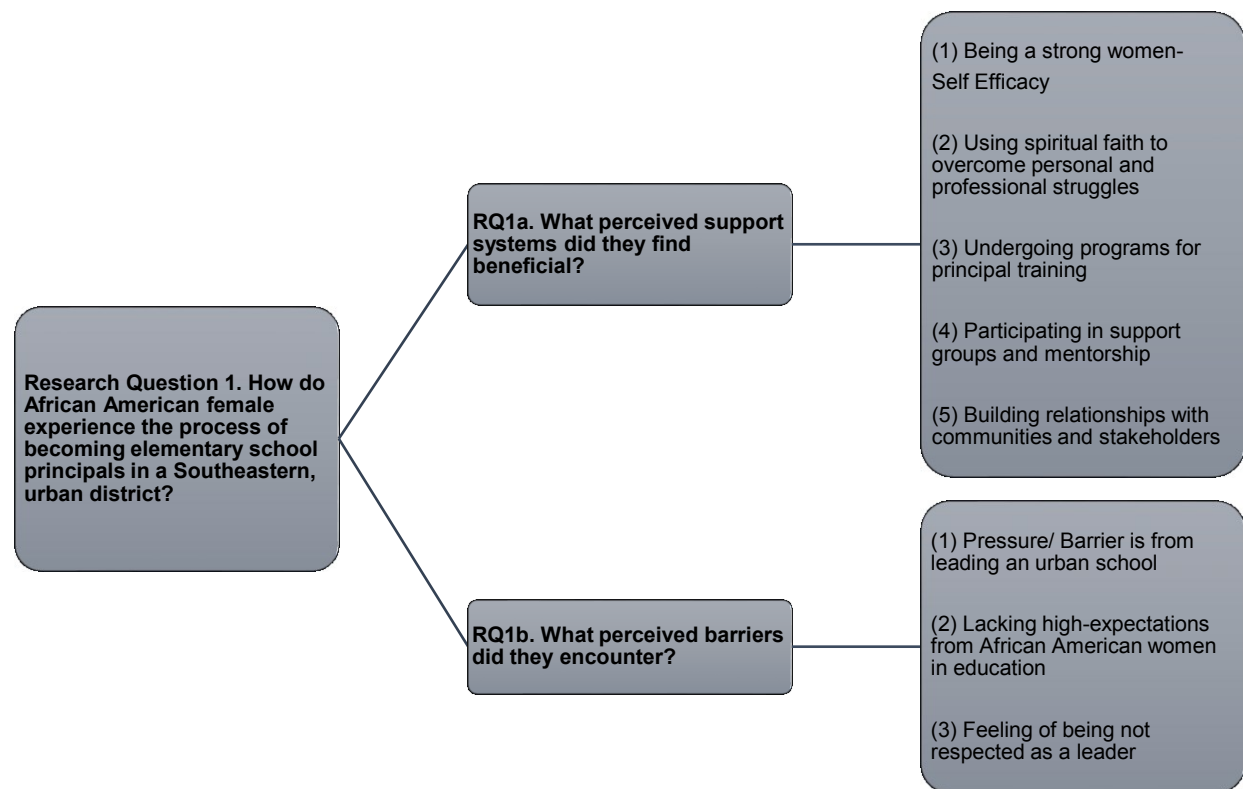
For the second research question and sub-questions, it was asked how educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations have helped or hindered the career paths of African American female principals. The survey results indicated that principals invested in formal educational courses, programs, and trainings from different institutions. The results of the survey demonstrated and highlighted how formal education paved the way for the female principals to gain enough knowledge and skills to lead their schools, students, and communities. These networking systems used to support the principals are their spirituality, sororities, and mentoring programs.

### **Results: Interviews**

**Research Question 1.** How do African American female experience the process of becoming elementary school principals in a Southeastern, urban district?

The first research question had two sub-questions, referring to the support systems that have influenced the career paths of African-American female principals; and the other about the perceived barriers that have influenced the career paths of African American female principals. The first sub-question had four emerging perspectives, all pertaining to the support systems considered by the principals as helpful aspects and components leading to their principalship. Meanwhile, three significant perceptions on the barriers faced were also discovered. Figure 2

contains the illustration of the findings addressing the first research question of the study based on the interviews.



*Figure 2.* Illustration of RQ1 Interview Findings

**RQ1a.** What perceived support systems did they find beneficial? Under the first sub-question, different beneficial support systems were identified by the interviewed African-American female principals. The key support systems found were the: characteristic of being strong women who can perform different responsibilities-self efficacy, as a professional and homemaker; using spiritual faith to overcome personal and professional struggles; building relationships with communities and stakeholders and participating in support groups and mentorship. Meanwhile, other support systems identified but may need further validation were: undergoing programs for principal training; and having past experiences in principalship. A more thorough research exploration is needed for the said perspectives as these perceptions were



mentioned only by the minority of the interviewed principals. No external support system was identified. There was more focus on internal support systems. Table 2 contains the breakdown of the principal perspectives addressing the first sub-question of RQ1.

**Table 2**

*Breakdown of the principal perspectives on the support systems that have influenced the career paths of African American female principals*

Principal Perspectives
Being strong women who can perform different responsibilities, as a professional and homemaker-Self Efficacy
Using spiritual faith to overcome personal and professional struggles
Undergoing programs for principal training
Participating in support groups and mentorship
Building relationships with communities and stakeholders

***Being strong women who can perform different responsibilities, as a professional and homemaker-self efficacy.*** The first key perspective of the study was the characteristic of being strong women who can perform different responsibilities, as a professional and a homemaker. Ms. Brooker explained that support comes from her ability to perform many different tasks and responsibilities as a woman. She explained the strength comes from being a capable African-American woman who was raised to be strong and determined in life, one who can fulfill all tasks as expected of her:

As a black woman, we are brought up to be strong and independent. Just being a woman in general, we are superwoman and we got it all going on, I can handle anything, can do everything, I learned the hard ways that's a lot, you can't do daily, and struggled to do it.

As black woman, we are raised to be strong then handle anything. I just learned the hard way that it is a lot. You cannot do it all or do it well. My daily struggle is to balance between home and profession. It is odd that by the time I retire my children will be out of the house, and that kind a like what I had been waiting on to devote more time to for work that I enjoyed. I will be able to stay to seven or eight at night I will be able to go in on weekends. My husband [can] do something and I will be fine then, and I can retire. It is not as bad as it used to be, but it is a daily struggle. I want to open the door when my kids come home, open the door when my husband come home, fix breakfast for them every morning, I never want to leave my family on Saturday, I don't want to pull out things on the kitchen table I want to be fully engaged in family at all times. (Ms. Brooker, individual interview, 2016)

Ms. Washington echoed that she is a driven woman and women are known throughout history to have the capability to persevere despite the challenges and issues they are faced with:

I am driven, I have spirit of perseverance, I know historically we had to push a little bit harder to get this far. The reality of it is I relate to students, to my population, which others call "at risk". I think my life experiences as a whole makes me want to push harder to do better. Just so our kids can do better (Ms. Washington, individual interview, 2016)

In the literature, Becks-Moody (2004) previously reported one of the main obstacles in the career achievement of the African-Americans was the ability to balance family and career. However, from the first perspective of the current study, it was highlighted how these African-American principals have relied on their personal knowledge and capabilities to excel further in their careers despite their responsibilities outside their respective schools. From the interviews,

the key perspective indicated the principals' strong characteristics and positive attitudes as women. The principals found their strong personalities increased their determination and resilience in supporting their career aspirations further. The positive outlook of the principals is vital given that Sharp and Walter (2012) indicated that elementary school principals have the chief role of ensuring the high quality and level of performance of each child in their schools; with the principals' strong characteristics and flexibility, they are able to perform their duties accordingly.

*Using spiritual faith to overcome personal and professional struggles.* The second perspective of the study was religion as a support system, in particular, using faith to overcome personal and professional struggles. Ms. Brooker identified her religion as a strong support system. Her spiritual faith over the years became her strength despite facing barriers and struggles at work, sharing:

I use my spiritual faith throughout the years when I struggle at work. I was telling someone the other day when things are off balanced, or I am not giving enough to everybody or I am about to cry, and I don't know why or when I feel my heart beating fast. That lets me know I am out of sync with him because that day I didn't pray, read my bible and if I can get back to that day or moment it will come back up, and he gives me perspective and reminds me. Girl I got you, do not worry! We will get through this one-step at a time. My spirituality has been one of my biggest strategies (Ms. Brooker, individual interview, 2016)

Ms. Snow echoed being a Christian woman allows her to manage the many issues she is faced with as a principal of an urban school. She also related the teachings of her religion allowed her to make the correct decisions when needed:

It goes with my empathy and compassion as a person that listens, and a lot of times when my families is crying out they just want to be heard. Those things are a part of whom I am. My make-up as a Christian woman, I would do this with anybody, but it helps a great deal when kids come in angry, or if something is happening at home is affecting them or at school. I can use that empathy and get them back on track. Sometimes they need nurturing, they need hugs. I have to often time tell kids, “leave that at home this is your sanctuary”. To know that you are loved and valued. It will be there when you get home, but right now let us just enjoy our day. It can be any character in black or white but that is my characteristics to who I am. It is important to connect with the people of color and the other ethnicity as well, not just with black families but with everybody (Ms. Snow, individual interview, 2016)

One of the main obstacles in the career progression of African-American women as reported in Becks-Moody’s (2004) study was the spirituality of the women. Again, this claim was proven otherwise by the participants of the current study. The second finding was the participants’ perception and experience that their spiritual beliefs have supported them in the process of achieving their career goals as educators and principals. In addition, the participants emphasized how much their faith activated their positive values and attitudes as principals; and the correct actions and behaviors when dealing with difficult situations. The principals attributed their optimism despite their struggles, actions, and accomplishments to their strong faith and religion.

***Participating in support groups and mentorship.*** The third principal perspective that emerged was the presence of support system through groups and mentorship, more specifically from their active participation or involvement in the said groups. Ms. Smith shared she

participates in small principal groups which she uses as support and network development.

Through these small groups, she can share knowledge and information and learn from her well-respected and experienced colleagues:

Well, I would just say that we mentor each other in our small principal group. Because that is where you can go and get the support, any information you may need, assistance, but any other type of mentor beside that I would say no. Make sure you are prepared to do everything. You are going to have to put on several hats because you may not get the support that you need. Then you need to find a group that you can call or ask questions. So, find somebody that you trust that will listen to you and to help you. If it was not for our small principal group, there is very little support. (Ms. Smith, individual interview, 2016)

Ms. Washington added mentorship was also another support system that influenced her success as she always felt guided by her mentor, saying:

Kind of, I was assigned a mentor at the beginning of the season. She was a seasoned principal and she had no idea that I would be so busy. When I saw her, it was good, but our path did not cross as much as it should, or how I would like it to. I have reached out to several others I feel in that aspect I am supported. (Ms. Washington, individual interview, 2016)

The third principal perspective that followed was the support system from different groups and the mentorship received from their peers. The principals in the study shared how support, collaboration, and openness with the stakeholders aid their leadership; and in accomplishing their goals as a community. The principals shared there are supportive groups, individuals, and respected mentors who have continuously assisted and guided them in achieving

their goals. For the principals, the groups and mentors allow them to gain more knowledge based on the feedback and experiences of their peers and colleagues.

***Building relationships with communities and stakeholders.*** The fourth perspective was the support system coming from the communities and stakeholders or by building relationships with communities and stakeholders. Ms. Snow also found it important to have the relationships with the community and its stakeholders as her support in her career as a principal. By building relationships with the members of the school community, her advocacies and programs are better managed, received, and appreciated:

It is my responsibility to personally talk with kids, nurture, build relationship with families, where I can have though talks about education with my clientele and economic status may not have the knowledge or value education. So, that is a unique responsibility by educating parents about important to getting kids to schools that they need to be here, whether you are taking them to the doctor or to get medication or therapy, so I have a unique role there. I build relationship with my parents, so I can have though hard conversations. Whether it is about dressing appropriately to come to school things like that, or what you do to your kids intentionally or unintentionally it has an effect on them. Even how you come to school and present yourself in your dress and talk or walk that is what is unique in what I do. I do not think my duties are any different than any other principal out there, but that my characteristics as a person are different in my relationship with my families (Ms. Snow, individual interview, 2016).

Ms. Jones echoed the strong support from and the relationship with the members of the community allowed her to perform her duties better and more effectively. She added that as a leader, she needs to show genuine care and support to the whole community:

One would be bridging a gap between what people think they know and what is really going on in urban schools with a high minority population. I think especially non-African Americans let's say white people are very negative about schools that have a huge minority population. Parents of non-African American kids have stereotypes. I feel like it's my job to let them know that I do have parents who care about education. That is a big misconception about urban schools. Last year, I had an interview with the media, she would never admit it, but one thing I told her that she needed to put in there was that we have do have parents support here, and it is everybody job and I take offense to it. (Ms. Jones, individual interview, 2016)

With regard to the support systems that have influenced the career paths of African-American female participants, the majority of the principals found the positive impact in their personal and professional lives of being strong women who can perform different responsibilities; and using spiritual faith to overcome personal and professional struggles. For the majority of the participants, personal resilience and spiritual faith aided them in pursuing their dreams of becoming successful African-American principals. Meanwhile, it was also discovered that undergoing training programs also increases their skills and knowledge. Principals also reported they participated in support groups and mentorship programs to gain confidence and have access to useful networks. In connection to having support groups, participants also indicated the importance of building relationships with communities and stakeholders. Through these findings, it was established that African-American women had various support systems that have successfully influenced their careers today.

**RQ1b.** What perceived barriers did they encounter? The second sub-question under the first research question was the discussion of the perceived barriers encountered by the

participants. Distinctively, the principals shared they did not experience personal barriers; but instead, the pressure was mainly from leading public urban schools where they felt the need to perform and work more than the other school leaders. This was to provide the best quality of education to their students. Meanwhile, other key barriers were also discovered which were the feeling of unappreciated as a leader and lacking high-expectations from African-American women in education. Table 3 contains the breakdown of the barriers under the first research question.

Table 3

*Breakdown of the principal perspectives on the perceived barriers that have influenced the career paths of African American female principals*

Principal Perspectives
Pressure/ Barrier is from leading an urban school
Lacking high-expectations from African American women in education
Feeling of being not respected as a leader

***Pressure/ barrier is from leading an urban school.*** The first principal perspective from the sub-research question was the pressure in leading an urban school. For some of the participants, pressure can also be considered as a barrier as they always felt the need to work harder so that their students and schools can be at par with the schools in their state. Ms. Snow uniquely shared that personally, she did not experience any barrier in her career path. However, handling and managing an urban school; as well as thinking of new ways to improve the school has always been an issue in her profession:



No, I don't I fight very vocal about what we need. I know there may be people out there that might have bias, but I haven't experienced that. I think it is my job just sitting in this chair, whoever comes thru the school that I serve needs support and help. I say very candidly, I get kids that are a very transit population. A lot of times they come from hospitals, or what have you. So, it is my jobs to get up and fight for their wants or what the kids should have. Nobody has ever in my experiences in my twelve years ever shunned me or said negative things to me or anything or me like that. I do not feel like there is a struggle because I am an African American principal. Now, if you had said something about where my school is, or we at the bottom of the totem pole when people want to serve, my answer may be different. But I keep my school, staff and students in the forefront in the district's mind that I do not care where we live, and do not treat us like we are second hand citizens. Not saying they do because my voice is out there, that why they do not consider doing it. I am not going to sit there and wait. I am going to speak up and say what we want, and when I need things. So, no, there have not been any constraints. I do not allow it to happen. (Ms. Snow, individual interview, 2016)

Ms. Smith added the pressure of leading an urban school and not from being an African-American leader or principal, saying:

I do not know any that are specific to African American principal. The pressure in an urban school is to make sure the students have the skills that they need in order to be successful especially on the state assessment. In life, in general, a lot of our kids come, and they are not only lacking academic skills, social skills, and mental health issues. So, I think that would just be the issues in any urban school. It harder for African American because we have to do better, or we will be the first to be let go. Positions are made at

central office for white principals that are struggling in urban schools. African American principals are demoted to assistant principals. (Ms. Snow, individual interview, 2016)

Ms. Jones echoed she does not have personal issues as an African-American principal.

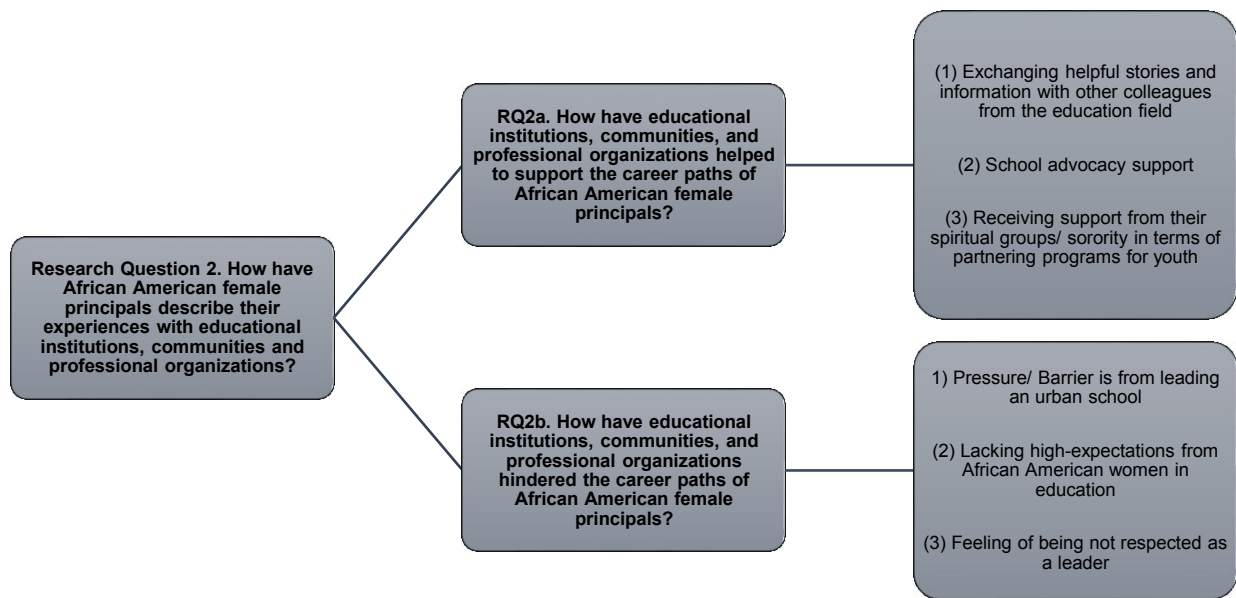
Similarly, she experienced difficulties in relating with the African-American parents in her school as there was a lack of cooperation and involvement to improve the education of their children:

No, I am a professional person first; I am going to do my thang. There are African American parents that want me to cut them some slack. To change the rule or sit down I go out of my way trying to help people but also need to set a standard. In a school where there was not many before me and I have taken a lot of flax for that personally. Last year, when they are used to certain things and then I come in and say we are not doing that and there is a lot of push back going on. Parent were pissed off at me and stated you cannot come out like that and I stated yes, I would. I said at this school that is what it will be or there are 89 schools in the district to choose from here. Do not assume that people cannot do anything that they do not care about their kids. In a high poverty, school there is many negative things. Even when talking to other educators in different building say things like those kids, and they believe them to score novice in the building. It is sad, but it's where you have to inform people. I have to check people and say you do not know what is going on in my school. I think it happens at a lot of schools, too. (Ms. Jones, individual interview, 2016)

The second sub-question from the first research question was the inquiry on the teachers' perceived barriers that have influenced the career paths of African-American female principals. In the literature, researchers such as Charmer-Laird et al. (2016), Comber and Woods (2016),

Paulle, (2014) and Simon et al. (2013) all reported that indeed, pressure is present when working in a high poverty school. The participants in the current study indicated they did not face serious barriers, but the challenge stemmed from leading an urban school where the student population has more unique needs as compared to other schools. Meanwhile, another issue was lacking high-expectations from African-American women in education. Again, the perspective was substantiated in the literature when Smith (2010) reported that African-American women principals are faced with the issue of “systemic prejudice” from the community; wherein powerful women figures in this case, the principals experience stronger partiality and inequality. Given this perception, the participants found it disappointing that their gender and race are being used to criticize and deemphasize their abilities as principals.

**Research Question 2.** How have African American female principals describe their experiences with educational institutions, communities and professional organizations? The second research question was the inquiry on the experiences of the participants with different institutions. Again, two sub-research questions were developed. The two sub-research questions were: (A) How have educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations helped to support the career paths of African American female principals; and (B) How have educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations hindered the career paths of African American female principals? Figure 3 contains the graphic representation of the perspectives addressing the second research question of the study, based on the interviews.



*Figure 3. Illustration of RQ2 Interview Findings*

For the first sub-research question, the most significant perspective was the support of the different institutions where the exchange of helpful stories and information with other colleagues from the education field was deemed vital by the interviewed principals. Other experiences were: school advocacy support and the support from spiritual groups in terms of partnering programs for youth. Meanwhile, for the second sub-research question, the same institutional barriers were discovered as reported in the first research question. The barriers discussed were feeling pressured, lack of high expectations, and the lack of respect as leaders. Table 4 contains the breakdown of principal perspectives addressing the second research question.

Table 4

*Breakdown of the principal perspectives on how educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations have helped to support the career paths of African American female principals*

Principal Perspectives
Exchanging helpful stories and information with other colleagues from the education field
School advocacy support
Receiving support from their spiritual groups/ sorority in terms of partnering programs for youth

***Exchanging helpful stories and information with other colleagues from the education field.*** Another significant finding was the opportunity of exchanging helpful stories and information with other colleagues from the education field. Ms. Brooker shared the importance of having colleagues from the educational field to exchange stories, experiences, and knowledge with; the exchange of narratives can be utilized to continuously improve her leadership despite the many issues or barriers she is faced with:

... At different time, we have small purposeful or formal gathering opportunities of African American woman in the principalship it has been seven or eight years before they were share stories I thought that to be supportive but outside of that, just a symbol of everyone that came before me. (Ms. Brooker, individual interview, 2016)

Meanwhile, Ms. Snow shared that her previous internship allowed her to develop trusted friends and colleagues whom she can contact whenever she needs help in handling crucial issues and situations in school, she explained:

Absolutely, prior to my principalship for sure I was an intern after that I had some two people for a few years that went thru I trust them. On how to handle situations like hard

conversation, or how to handle this or that. A long-time mentor not so much. Some would say call me if you need me kind of stuff every now and then. Nobody that been there all the time, but I feel I could go to anyone I want to at any time, but I did not have a mentor. (Ms. Snow, individual interview, 2016)

Ms. Smith then highlighted that other principals are present to provide the needed resources and information in her principalship. She added they also ask questions or suggestions from each other as the need arises:

Well, other principals in my group that provide resources, information, if don't know how to do budgets, we can ask each other, or any situation that arises that we are unfamiliar with we help each other. That really is the only thing I can think of. (Ms. Smith, individual interview, 2016)

Ms. Washington simply shared she has formed a small network that allows her to connect with other principals, and have access to information when needed:

I am not from Louisville so as a teacher I worked at a state agency, which was a whole different ball game. As administrator, I came in when there was a bit of a network. Some I reach out to and some who reach out to me. I am not an extravert, so I believe that they are there, but it is not formal. (Ms. Washington, individual interview, 2016)

Finally, Ms. Jones emphasized having mentors is effective in improving herself as a principal and hearing constructive feedback or suggestions to develop her abilities along the way, saying:

There is a mentor role where they access issues thru observation in house and gives immediate feedback. That is hard for me to do as often, as I liked. One thing we were working on was building teacher capacity. I would come and watch this and give me feedback. That was the reason to bring her inside the building but when she got there; she

became a mentor for me as well. She shortens my learning curve and that was the biggest thing. As we were talking and working on stuff she, would say have you thought about this or that. She did not push but she would come up with thing I did not think consider. I did not have much experience and she had been one for ten years. It helps me become more effective. (Ms. Jones, individual interview, 2016)

The key perspective of exchanging of helpful stories and information with other colleagues from the education field is similar to an earlier reported perspective. Under this vital experience, participants emphasized how much the small conversations, suggestions, and advice from their colleagues in the educational field help them in developing their leadership as they can apply the new-found knowledge in their respective schools. Young et al. (2009) also discussed the perception established from the participants' interviews and stated that principals should be more open to sharing ideas and new knowledge with their peers to learn from one another and gain valuable insights from their networks.

***School advocacy support.*** Another perspective that followed was the report on how support from various stakeholders enabled the provision of funds and budgets from the district to support school advocacies. Ms. Snow stated she has also been fortunate in receiving enough budget and funds to support the school projects and advocacies. From creating literacy programs to implementing reading projects, the funds have allowed her to provide quality education to their students:

Title 1, Section 7 they give me budget type of funds that I receive that support my school. My school is one that receives The Literacy Project in the district where they are trying to help urban school to get students reading on level. That one is working very well. There was also in the first half of the year The Magic Letter, it was a reading program as well

that came from university professors in the community. Students are supposing to school with knowing a certain amount of vocabulary before they are successful. So, what the theory he found that it's not about knowing certain words, but less go with the words they do know. Let's start around that and increase reading abilities and it did do well. They came up with whatever strategies they were using did increase the students reading abilities some, but for whatever reason I think they ran out of funds it was unable to continue. That was another program that an urban school was thought out to be used.

(Ms. Snow, individual interview, 2016)

Ms. Snow added her school also received training programs and budgets to constantly provide quality education even to the minorities of her school. She highlighted the district has been doing a good job in providing some of the needed resources:

I wanted to make sure, our district has an Equity Institute I went to a few times a year, and I make sure my staff has that as well. The equity part it is not just African-American here, but we have other minority here that learn about their cultures, and different things like how woman and men are treated in other countries. Understand when we say look me in the eye were their culture says not to look into a person eyes. Another program we have is call A.B.R.I. (Academic and Behavior Intervention Program) from the University staff where they came sat us down and ask us what we wanted our school to be. Created the step there we have a high volume of transition and a high volume of noises. We started from scratch with them a year or two ago that pro-acted in our approach it keeps things in line. It helps me not to just understand poverty in our area, but for other as well.

The district is good at providing resources. (Ms. Snow, individual interview, 2016)



Ms. Smith described that the district has provided resources to train and improve the skills of their teachers to provide better education for the children. Furthermore, the training programs allowed for the development of practices on how to succeed in leading and managing urban schools:

I really think that PLC conference and cohort we were a part of that the district initiated with some schools. Was very helpful for our school and staff to focus on kids, and to look at data and provide the next step for our students. I really liked the Literacy Project that the district provided funds for our teacher to take classes in literacy. I even liked the whole relationship piece with the former superintendent and that Care for Kids relationship building especially in urban schools with the key to success. Being able to build positive relationship not only with students, families, teachers and teacher's families also. (Ms. Smith, individual interview, 2016)

Lastly, Ms. Jones shared she was also able train and develop with the help and support of the district she is under:

The district came out and did a culture assessment last year and some follow up professional development. Things I got from literacy program that help me from my perspective and with the diversity office. I went to the chief diversity officer last year and set up a meeting and said this is what I need, and can your department help me. I gave him a list and he reply okay. Sending kids to boot camp/ summer programs last year and other programs helped my school. The chief equity office paid for some of the professional development. That is something we were able to do with the help of the district. (Ms. Jones, individual interview, 2016)

Under the second key perspective, participants highlighted that despite the reports of the lack of support and assistance for urban schools, the district has provided them with enough resources to support their goals. Several principals shared that financial aids and resources have permitted them to establish training programs to increase the quality of education to benefit their students. In addition, the financial support allowed the principals to work around and target some areas where much improvement and changes are needed.

***Receiving support from spiritual groups in terms of partnering programs for the youth.***

The final perspective established was receiving support from the participants' spiritual groups in terms of partnering programs for the youth. Ms. Snow explained that her spiritual group has been a big supporter of her principalship where she can reach out to them whenever she has programs for her students. The group is then present to assist and partner with the school:

My church is very supportive of me fortunately; my church is in the same neighborhood as my school. I can reach out to them and ask for whatever I need. The YMCA I use to have them here and they want to start something with my pre-school program. I have the Street Academy here and a church group thru Canaan came thru for a year or two for our boys.

Those kinds of group we have here for our needs. The Street Academy is still here but nothing going on right now. I know I have the support of the Newburg Ministerial Administrative Association and one serves on my SBDM board. There is nothing I cannot ask for and get. (Ms. Snow, individual interview, 2016)

The second and final research question asked: how educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations have helped to support the career paths of African American female principals. As discussed above, all participants indicated that exchanging helpful stories

and information with other colleagues from the education field was beneficial for their careers. The participants highlighted they have since formed supportive and effective relationships with their colleagues in the educational field. Another funding was the support for the school advocacies where financial support and resources were provided as requested and needed. Finally, another significant perception was the support from the spiritual and sorority groups in terms of partnering programs for the youth. For the second sub-research question, it was discovered that the principals' reported institutional barriers were similar to the overall barriers they have previously indicated. From the responses in the second research question, principals emphasized how the support of the institutions allowed them to overcome the minimal barriers and challenges that they experienced in their journey.

### **Results: Focus Group Discussions (FGD)**

The focus group discussions were briefly conducted with the same participants of the interviews. From the qualitative thematic analysis of the FGDs, one new and significant finding was discovered, addressing the second sub-research question of Research Question One. When asked about the support systems that have influenced the career paths of African American female principals, participants again emphasized the significance of participating in support groups and mentorship; and undergoing programs to train for principalship. Meanwhile, the main difference discovered was the emergence of another perspective which was the barrier of exclusion in terms of race and gender. This finding was not discussed or conferred during the one-on-one interviews with the participants. However, the FGD allowed the three participants to share this unique experience. Ms. Brooker gave an example of how being an African-American female principal could indeed be a barrier in terms of the overall provision of budget and support. This is contrary to the previous finding where the principals stated that they receive

support in terms of funding and sources for their school plans and goals. Additionally, as an African-American, Ms. Brooker admitted how it could be difficult to be too honest or truthful especially when communicating with the higher-ups as there is always a possibility of being sanctioned or disciplined, saying:

I will give you a prime example: If Claire or Susie, white principals, were black without any doubt they would had their programs pulled a long time ago for being so outspoken. They would say baby you are not about to do that oh no! We were on a conference call about budget over the winter break and she was saying I am going to jump out there and speak out a bit. As an African American you can't take a chance without fear of being disciplined. That's just the way it is. (Ms. Brooker, focus group, 2016)

Meanwhile, Ms. Smith admitted that race plays a bigger part in experiencing exclusion and isolation during formal meetings and functions. From her personal experience, she opened up and shared how it has been difficult for her to attend meetings and training programs as there is always a feeling of unfamiliarity and seclusion. Additionally, she also gave a common occurrence in urban schools where African-Americans would be often grouped together or separated from the other races. She then explained:

Other people want to exclude us. I do not know how much is my personality and how much is race. Race plays a bigger part in it. From the very beginning in the book (I forgot the name of it), about why all the black kids sit together during lunch. It's the same feeling I get when walking into principals meeting. I immediately look for where will I sit. That use to be a big issue for me whether at trainings. It would be very much segregated. In the high school cafeteria, the blacks over there and white over here. Why are all the blacks doing over there and this woman saying, yes, you are right and not

seeing it at first? She was not shock it the nature of the beast. I went so far as to break out of that, but I do not believe it is a racist thing. I think it is a friend thing. You want to sit and be with people you feel comfortable with. So, with us as adults it is still there. We have to know when to hold and when to fold. I am always measuring my words how am I going to say something. (Ms. Snow, focus group, 2016)

The third source of data also reinforced earlier findings that there were indeed several participants who did not experience personal barriers. However, participants did not discuss and expand much on how the different institutions have helped to support their career path, except for Ms. Snow who again highlighted the benefit of having other colleagues from the educational field who she can talk to about her leadership concerns and issues:

The program for administrators at her university was one and our sorority was full of educators that made it easier. It was not as I was in a field where there was nobody else in it... For me it would be the church that was full of educators there helped to form my opinion and to shape me. The church pushed me into to education period. (Ms. Snow, focus group, 2016)

### **Results: Artifacts**

For the final source or the artifacts, *The Data Management, Planning, and Program Evaluation* document was analyzed to obtain a better understanding of the school background and population of the five interviewed principals. All schools were from a public urban school district. Based on the analysis, it was discovered that the number of African American (AA) elementary male principals are increasing; while the AA elementary female principals have been declining the past five years. From the data, a map was presented which showed the AA principals are typically in the lower socioeconomic parts of town: downtown west end and high

minority areas. Out of the 28 AA principals only three are in affluent areas and one district in the area has no AA principals.

From the five schools of the participants, it was observed that majority or four of the five elementary schools analyzed in the study were mainly composed of “Black” students; while only one school had a dominant population of “White” students. The data also showed the elementary accountability profile of the five schools. From the data, it was presented that only one of the five schools met their Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO). Based on the 2015 classification of the district, all five schools were reported to still be needing improvement; and one school was “progressing but still needs further improvement”. Four schools from the current study were considered to be “focus schools” and one was unidentified; in general, 33 out the 55 total schools were focus schools. According to *The Data Management, Planning, and Program Evaluation*, a focus school has “a non-duplicated gap group score in the bottom 10% of the state; has an individual group of students scoring significantly low; or has a graduation rate less than 60 for two consecutive years” (p. 10).

Another section of the document discussed the percentage of teachers who had a Master’s Degree or higher. It was then established that all five schools had an average of 78.8% teachers with a high educational attainment. Finally, as for the “Free or Reduced Lunch” offered by the schools, it was analyzed that the last two school years or 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016, all five schools were reported to have increased their assistance to their students.

The data from the artifacts can be used as evidence that indeed, all five schools need improvement in various areas; and that they are still considered to be below the state's standards. Findings from the artifacts supported the need to further focus on the development of not only the principals, but more so, the students of the urban schools. The data included facts that these

schools are currently facing difficulties in developing the scores and educational achievements of their students.

### **Triangulation of Findings**

The first source of data was the survey with five principals. From the surveys, new perceptions were established while the original perspectives from the interviews were also corroborated. In the surveys, the principals responded their support systems included the encouragement from their formal program trainings and education; as well as the encouragement from their household and family members. Meanwhile, in the interviews, the participants did not mention the program trainings and skills as their support system but mainly highlighted their family and spirituality. As for the barriers, according to the survey results, both the interviews and surveys produced similar findings. African-American female participants shared their major concern about managing the issues present in urban schools. Finally, another major variation between the interviews and surveys was the discovery that the principals received a high degree of formal education, trainings, and programs in leadership and leading in schools with high poverty and diversity; as compared to the interviews where participants mentioned they received leadership development support but was limited.

The second source of the interpretative research study was the interviews with the five female AA principals. The first research question had two sub-research questions which discussed the beneficial support systems and barriers that have influenced the career paths of African-American female principals. For the first sub-research question, principal perspectives were discovered. Participants shared their support systems are their personal, family, and spiritual beliefs. They identified themselves as being strong women who can perform different responsibilities, both as professionals and homemakers. Other support systems included using

spiritual faith to overcome personal and professional struggles, undergoing training programs, and participating support groups and mentorship programs. For the second sub-research question, which explored on the perceived barriers of the AA female principals; the majority of the principals believed that pressure from leading an urban school was a barrier. In addition, the lack of belief and respect on their capabilities was identified as well. Finally, it was reported that the groups and institutions were indeed helpful in supporting and guiding the principals in their career paths. All principals emphasized the practice of exchanging helpful stories and information with other colleagues from the education field was the most effective type of support that they received from the educational and professional institutions. The principals also expressed they were given the proper budget and funding despite the initial problems and issues in their leadership. Their spiritual group/s also provided guidance and strengthened their leadership in their respective schools.

The third source of data was the focus group discussions with the five principals. From the analysis of the FGDs with the principals, it was again highlighted that having strong support groups, mentorships, and trainings were helpful. These ideas corroborated with the principal perspectives presented in the interview results. However, the main difference was the discovery of another barrier which was the exclusion of leaders during functions and conferences because of their race and gender. This barrier was not at all reported during the personal or one-on-one interviews with the principals.

The final source of data was the collected data entitled *The Data Management, Planning, and Program Evaluation*. The data contained the background and statistics of the past and current performances of the urban public-school district. In general, it was revealed that there is a recent trend on the increase in the number of AA elementary male principals; while the AA



elementary female principals have been diminishing in the past five years. From the data, four of the five schools reported in this research study were mostly composed of African-American students. Finally, the data also presented how all five schools classified as *needing improvement* by the state assessment; and even *below the state's standards*. The results established from the artifacts were presented to better comprehend the school background of the five principals as well as the current attitudes and perceptions of the principals. From the status of all five schools in terms of their accountability, classification, and achievement of goals, the barriers in leading urban schools were evidenced and substantiated further. In the next chapter, these findings should be interpreted and evaluated further based on the framework and literature of the study.

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

The chapter contained the survey results, findings from the analyses of the interviews and focus group discussions, and the interpretations of the artifacts and surveys. The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the experiences of African-American women who persevered in becoming principals in urban public elementary schools. The surveys highlighted how the principals benefitted from formal training programs and courses as well as leading in schools with high rates of poverty and diversity. Upon the analysis of the second set of data or the interviews, different perspectives were also discovered based on the firsthand experiences of the principals. Meanwhile, from the focus group discussions, only one new perspective emerged which is significantly different from the barriers earlier reported in the interviews. Surprisingly, during the discussions, four participants admitted to experiencing exclusion due to gender and race. Subsequently, the artifacts were presented to understand the origins and background of the principals better; by providing information on the past and current conditions of the schools that

they are leading. The final chapter should then discuss the interpretation of the findings, limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusions.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

As indicated in the literature review, Tillman and Scheurich (2013), reported that the marginalization of African American women, based on race, has the effect of making them feel excluded and they therefore have the perception that they are their own support system, making their pathways to leadership careers different and challenging. Jean-Marie (2013) explained that African American female principals must be provided with a voice to share their experiences and perceptions on how they successfully dealt with challenges and barriers to the principalship. According to Townsend and MacBeath (2011), African American principals have used their historical experiences to create an environment and a culture that are conducive for students. These researchers claim that African American female principals play a significant role in enabling African American students to understand their own historical experiences. Contributing to the research, Gardner, Barrett and Pearson (2014) have argued that, despite literature stressing the importance of their presence in schools and colleges, African American female administrators are still seriously underrepresented in the K-12 setting and higher education. African American students and educators are most likely to be placed in high poverty schools. According to National Equity Atlas (2016), in all the public schools in the United States, 42.62 % of students were placed in high poverty schools. Most of this 42.62 % are minority and/or poor students.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The purpose of this interpretive research is to specifically examine African American female principals' perceptions of supports and barriers on the career pathway to the principalship in urban public elementary schools. The research focuses on two specific questions:

**RQ1.** How do African American female experience the process of becoming elementary school principals in a Southeastern, urban district?

**RQ1a.** What perceived support systems did they find beneficial?

**RQ1b.** What perceived barriers did they encounter?

**RQ2.** How have African American female principals describe their experiences with educational institutions, communities and professional organizations?

**RQ2a.** How have educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations helped to support the career paths of African American female principals?

**RQ2b.** How have educational institutions, communities, and professional organizations hindered the career paths of African American female principals?

The main themes that emerged from the data analysis are connection to spirituality, community organizations, participation in alternate certification programs, strong family connections, leadership styles, and historically black colleges / university attendance. While many of the themes emerging from these data overlapped, additional themes of balancing work and home, leading high poverty urban schools, and the pressures related to increasing student achievement were also found. The participants shared stories of experiences, supports from their family, spirituality, and community connection. The data provided evidence that life experiences, educational background, and educational programs informed the analysis of the career pathway to the elementary principalship. This chapter will address the theoretical and practical implications.

## **Theoretical Implications**

### **Support Systems**

**Self-efficacy.** In the literature, Becks-Moody (2004) previously reported that one of the main obstacles in the career achievement of the African-Americans was the ability to balance family and career. However, from the first perspective of the current study, it was highlighted how these African-American principals have relied on their personal knowledge and capabilities to excel further in their careers despite their responsibilities outside their respective schools. The principals in this research believed in their ability to be capable school leaders and effective family members. Gündemir, Dovidio, Homan, and De Dreu (2016) also used social cognitive theory to explain the importance, value, and influence of self-efficacy through leadership position. This research contributes to the knowledge on how African American women use self-efficacy to obtain their positions and influence organizational policies.

The participants shared, the key perspective indicated the principals' strong characteristics and positive attitudes. Among the strong characteristics principals described and displayed are: 1) a willingness to be self-advocates, 2) respect for the leadership position, 3) respect for and willingness to advocate for the children and families they serve, 4) belief that they can make a difference, 5) unafraid of accountability, 6) willing to put in the time required to accomplish goals, 7) ability to work with all role groups, and 8) ability to self-assess and change when needed. The principals found that their strong personalities increased their determination and resilience in supporting their career aspirations further. The positivity of the principals is vital given that Sharp and Walter (2012) indicated that elementary school principals have the chief role of ensuring the high quality and level of performance of each child in their schools;

with the principals' strong characteristics and flexibility, they can be enabled to perform their duties accordingly.

It is the researcher's hope that this investigation illuminates the experiences that have influenced the career pathways of African American females who have become elementary principals. Self-efficacy, the confidence to produce in a matter that is adequate and meets the expectations set forth, is an attribute that the women of this study posited that they had and needed in order to thrive in the school system that they all serve. In turn, many of the principals elucidated that in spite of marginalization, underestimations, and disproportionate absence of support from the school system, they were still able to be self-efficacious and maintain a high level of productivity and have a positive impact on the system. This is not to say that the principals did not or do not have difficulties in the role as principal. The researcher hopes to demonstrate that in spite of the voluminous amounts of resistance and organizational challenges, the participants in this study were able, through self-efficacy, to manage, maneuver, and maintain at a level that allowed them to remain employed and stand steadfast to their own beliefs and self-identity.

**Spirituality.** The African American principals were also clear that spiritual faith is foundational in their leadership. Although they were clear about not proselytizing, it was clear that the leaders in this research attributed the belief in a higher being as a mammoth for success and personal maintenance. This is supported by Letiecq who stated that, spirituality for African American females has been a system of support, which engages a trusting relationship with a higher power to hearten meaning, hope, and purpose in life (Letiecq, 2007). This second finding, reliance on a being greater than themselves, was the participants' perception and experience that their spiritual beliefs have supported them in the process of achieving their career goals as

educators and principals. In addition, the participants emphasized how much their faith activated their positive values and attitudes as principals. Their faith also dictated appropriate actions and behaviors when dealing with difficult situations. Despite managing their school assignments, families, everyday struggles, frustrations, and accomplishments, the principals attributed their optimism and belief in their abilities to their strong faith and religion.

The level of spirituality only seemed to serve as a means to uplift them past systemic problems that they recognized and experienced on a daily basis. Many of the principals considered their faith as something that encroached far beyond Sunday and was a natural part of how they confront and manage the burdens and blessings of being an educational leader. This was also exemplified in the manner to which they cherished Sundays. One principal shared, “I go to church to get reenergized for the week. There is so much that is asked of me throughout the week that I must stay faithful to the higher purpose of why I do what I do. I am reminded of that, when I go to church.”

It is evident that spirituality is a prominent fixture in the leadership of the principals. Even more evident is the apparent peace and power that they draw from their belief in a higher power and heavenly purpose. The spirituality to which the participants referred, not only allows them to face the challenges of being a school leader, but it also allows them to better negotiate and embrace the intersectionality of being a school leader, black, and a female. The triangulated reality of having those three qualities comes at a cost that they believe can only be paid by being connected to a God who bestows faith and fortitude so that they may continue to what one leader called “mission work”.

**Principal training.** The five participants viewed their principal and leadership support programs as a critical element to their career success. All the principals disclosed that by being a

part of principal and leadership programs offered by the school district and local universities, they were able to get a clearer understanding of the role, responsibilities, and needs of a school principal. Although many of the principals spoke about the benefits of participating in university or school district-led principal training and support programs, they also spoke to the complications of gaining access to such programs. Regardless of the complications related to program access and entry, they still believed that participating in leadership support programs provided them with the real-life experiences that helped them to view school leadership more realistically.

It was not just access and acceptance into the training and support programs that helped the participants become principals, it was the opportunity they had to hear and see differing viewpoints of leadership and student expectations. By being in certain preparation programs, the participants witnessed first-hand strength-based approaches and deficit-based approaches to leading. To the dismay of some of the leaders, the revelations were two-fold. Universities may want to consider principal programs that focus on leading high poverty schools in an urban school district. Research explains that the needs of high poverty schools and the needs of the students are very difficult and have to be addressed by the principal; who is the instructional and operational manager of the school.

The findings of this research are supported by Sharp and Walter who noted that the important role of elementary school principals is to ensure the high levels of performance for every child attending elementary education, based on the existing educational policies (Sharp & Walter, 2012). In this respect, their duties also entail the mentoring of elementary education teachers, disciplining students, and efficiently and effectively managing the budgets meant for elementary education. This means that the success of elementary education depends on the



ability of a principal to manage the above and any other crucial tasks they have in those schools (Michaux, 2011). Principals managing elementary education systems are also responsible for ensuring that necessary reforms are undertaken or implemented to ensure quality education to students (Michaux, 2011). Given that an overwhelming majority on African American female principals are responsible for guiding high-poverty, low-performing schools in which there are a significant number of students with social and emotional development concerns, they are more subject to time-consuming school audits and state level interventions to assess their adherence to reforms and regulations. They are often taken from being instructional leaders who devote most of their time to student achievement to producing and managing paperwork.

**Support groups and mentorship.** According to Jean-Marie (2013), even though all leaders within educational institutions face numerous challenges in terms of achieving success, African American female principals often face unique challenges that are linked to their own cultural background. Mentors provide people with the opportunity to share stories, ideas, systems, and activities to support. African American elementary principals have specific concerns that are related to their unique experiences and cultural background. The participants shared that mentorship provides educational leaders opportunities to learn the educational arena and to acquire strategies to navigate the system to the principal career path. Practical implications of the present study speak to the way in which mentorship has provided support for African American women elementary principals. Principals in the study primarily spoke of informal mentorships that occurred through friendships or social connection. They also spoke of the value of having experienced mentors assigned to them who were not responsible for assessing them. African American women in the study spoke to the importance of having another women to support them with tough decisions, parent concerns, and day-to-day operation

of an educator in leadership. An implication of the study is the need for both informal and formal mentorships. School districts might benefit from establishing mentorships programs for new principals—especially principals assigned to the most challenging schools. Mentors should be selected who have demonstrated success in working in conditions similar to those of the new principal and should be free of formal assessment responsibilities.

### **Building Relationships with Community Stakeholders**

This study extended the work on community support by Klein (2014) that states, historically, African American schools and educators encouraged community values. African American educators were a cultural symbol for the African American community and families from the time of slavery and racial segregation. According to Townsend and MacBeath (2011), African American principals have used their historical experiences to create an environment and a culture that are conducive for students. These researchers claim that African American female principals play a significant role in enabling African American students to understand their own historical experiences. The participants shared the importance of having community partnerships to help support the school.

African American educators were a symbol of pride and respect in the black community. Education was a profession that was considered to give back to the community and support the next generation of learners. African American educators typically lived in the community, attended the community church, and interacted with families in the community. Students would see educators in the community and there was a partnership with the parents and community. There was a sense of belonging and support from the community, parents, and students. The findings of this research contribute to the existing research on the importance of African American educators in the community. Educators were able to seek out people, businesses, and

churches to support the school. Participants that work in these high poverty schools seek out support from business and churches in the school area. They partner with activities that can support students emotionally and academically.

The participants shared that black Greek sororities and predominately black churches typically support high poverty school areas. Predominately black churches and black Greek sororities have supported these principals with community outreach programs, student mentorship, feeding programs, clothing assistance, scholarships, and tutoring programs. The participants used these programs to connect with students and families. The principals are members of these churches and sororities that support the school. The participants also used these relationships to share teaching strategies with parents who live in the community and have children who attend the school.

An implication of the study is the curriculum in principal preparation programs. More emphasis on developing and maintaining effective relationships and partnerships in communities surrounding high-poverty, low-performing schools would benefit all aspiring school leaders. Additionally, this segment of the curriculum should be facilitated by individuals (principals and community people) who have actually engaged in school and community partnerships.

## **Barriers**

**Pressure-leading an urban school.** The second sub-question from the first research question was the inquiry on the principals' perceived barriers that have influenced the career paths of African-American female principals. In the literature, researchers such as Charmer-Laird et al. (2016), Comber and Woods (2016), Paille, (2014) and Simon et al. (2013) all reported that indeed, pressure is present and observable in working in a high poverty school. The

challenge stemmed from leading an urban school where the student population has more unique needs as compared to other schools.

Sharp and Walter (2012) argued that principals are the key components for creating and maintaining successful schools in the United States. Sharp and Walter explained that all principals have demanding responsibilities; however, high poverty schools have an additional layer of challenges when focusing on discipline, staffing, collaborating in communities that can be violent, and connecting with families who are trying to maintain their basic needs. According to Tomal and Schilling (2013), along with facilitating the needs of the students, staff, and families there is an emphasis on curriculum, instruction, budget, and managerial needs to make a school run successfully. When examining the roles of principal in urban elementary schools, Moos et al. (2011) explained that diverse high poverty schools have a larger need and transient population for students and principals. The research supports that many challenges that are faced in high poverty schools is connected to student behavior and students starting school not having the basic skills; which attributes to high principal turnover (Moos et al., 2011; Tomal & Schilling, 2013).

Another identified challenge for African American female principals in an urban school district is related to the lack of high-expectations from African-American women in education. Again, the perspective was substantiated in the literature when Smith (2010) reported that African-American women principals are faced with the issue of “systemic prejudice” from the community; wherein powerful women figures in this case, the principals experience stronger partiality and inequality. Given this perception, the participants found it disappointing that their race was being used to criticize and deemphasize their abilities as principals; and what they can do for their schools.

The research has focused on African American principals who are leading schools in an urban setting. These principals have articulated triumphs and obstacles they have experienced while leading their respective schools. The researcher has discovered that African American female principals have to face certain challenges that are significant to their cultural background. Additionally, the researcher has also revealed that African American principals rely on certain aspects of their personal and professional life in order to maintain balance in a work place that can be uncompromising or have a misunderstanding to the plight of the African American principal.

**Lacking High-Expectations.** African American teachers are more likely to work and stay in high poverty schools when compared to White teachers (Casey et al., 2015). Many African American teachers consider it to be their duty to work in high poverty schools. Similarly, African American teachers are more likely to be personally committed to the positive outcomes of African American students (Harris, 2007). African American teachers are often motivated by humanistic commitments towards the improvement of the lives of students from high poverty schools, especially by filling the cultural gap in the background of teachers and students that exist in many high poverty schools (Parrett & Leverett, 2012). African American teachers also prove to be major role models for students of colors in terms of their own ambitions for career in teaching. African American teachers, by providing an example for career path in real life to minority students in high poverty schools, may inspire the students and prove instrumental in increasing the number of African American teachers in the future (Parrett & Leverett, 2012).

The African American teachers described above are most often those who become principals in communities similar to those in which they have a passion to teach or in which they were students. As stated earlier, principals in this study view their work in high-poverty schools

as their “mission.” However, principals shared that one disturbing distraction to accomplishing their mission is the low expectations of them, their faculty, and their students by district level administrator and the community.

The participants explained that there is a lack of high expectation for high poverty schools and principals. The principals shared that people have mindsets about high poverty schools that are hard to combat. Research explains that high poverty schools are considered a calling; therefore the staff members and teachers are committed to increase student achievement. High poverty schools do have parent involvement, high achieving students, good principals, and impactful teachers. The participants shared that high poverty schools typically take at least five years to see consistent turn around in the area of academics, culture, and school behavior. The principals believe that the administrators in these school are just as impactful as other principals even though accountability scores do not show the entire picture of their schools’ success. The participants felt it imperative to note that high poverty schools have to address many additional basic needs for the students to be viewed as successful.

**Feeling of not being respected as a leader.** The participants shared stories about their perceptions of leading a high poverty school. A common theme in their stories was the feeling of not being respected as a leader. The principals explained that they feel that a common perception of principals working in a high poverty school is that they are not “good” principals. Participants explained that they believe that this negative perception of them negatively impacts career advancement opportunities. Participants further explained that to advance from the principal role to a central office position, the principal had to be perceived a “good” principal. A good principal is typically associated with test scores and high poverty schools typically have lower scores. The perceived the lower test scores reduce their chance of advancement. The

principals noticed that principals that advanced in their career were typically at high performing school or had networking opportunities with current staff members in central office. Research by Brooks (2012) explains that African American principals are often placed in low performing schools and not recognized for their contributions. The principal position requires principals to be able to maintain school culture, discipline, and high academic standards for student success. A key component of the principal position is improving educational standards, student progress, and enhancing student education (Queen, Peel, & Shipman, 2013).

African American women in public education have discussed the impact of race on leadership in the urban school education arena. , Wilson and Roscigno (2010) and Jean-Maire (2013). Researchers continue to state that race continues to be a barrier for other African Americans who want to advance their career path in the leadership position. The racial barriers that African American women encounter can be discouraging for minorities who want to continue their leadership career path as principals. This research explains and connects the perceptions and experiences of African American women who were successful in following their career pathways to the principalship.

### **Practical Implications**

**Importance of African American educators.** Tillman's Research- The significance of leadership of African American principals in education after Brown v Board of Education. "The period following immediately after the ruling resulted in African American educators losing their jobs."(Tillman, 2008) Fuller, Young, and Orr's Research- The typical career path in educational leadership is teacher, principal, central office, superintendent. (Fuller, Young and Orr, 2007) According to researchers (Casey, Carlo, Bond, & Quintero, 2015), teachers of color are underrepresented in the teaching workforce, leading to large representation gaps between

students of color and teachers of color. The career pathway to the principalship starts with teaching. To increase the number of African American principals requires increasing the number of African American teachers. However, Becks-Moody (2004) has noted that, despite the challenges of achieving education and literacy, individuals like Mary McLeod Buthune and W. Dubois moved against all odds to educate both themselves and others. According to Becks-Moody (2004), as the Civil War ended, African Americans were allowed an opportunity to seek education. The above researcher has further noted that African American women were very instrumental in the education of African Americans and, for that matter, they doubled as school proprietors and administrators.

The participants shared the importance of having African American leadership which is connected to the research done by Lomotey and Tillman. This research explains that African American teachers provided role-models and cultural connections to African American students. This research study focused on the career path to principalship for African American women. To increase the number of African American principals has to start with African American teachers. Policy makers may want to create systems that actively recruit African American teachers and principals. There could be an intentional focus on recruiting and retaining African American educators. Research tells us the benefits of African American educators and the connections for African American students. An intentional system would include recruitment, retention, mentoring programs, professional development, and district preparatory leadership programs.

**Mentorship opportunities.** Mentoring is an opportunity for principals to learn from an experienced principal, provide mental support, provide a “safe place” for a colleague to voice concerns, and a partner to share ideas/ strategies on educational issues. The participants in the study shared that this school district provides a mentor to principals once they have obtained the



principal position; however that relationship was categorized as generic. The principals explained that the mentor that was assigned did not have many years of experience and their schools did not mirror each other; therefore strategies/ activities that were shared would not necessarily be beneficial at their school. The mentor experience that was created was very loose and did not provide much direction or support to the new principals. The participants in the study stressed the importance of having preparatory leadership programs before being assigned the principal position and then having a strong mentorship program for new principals the first two years that focused on supporting new principals and the challenges that arise with students, teachers, and parents.

Despite the fact that there are a number of African American women in school administrative positions, literature shows that they face a number of challenges, which can be perceived as struggles toward leadership positions. For instance, in a study conducted by Clayborne (2006), it was found that African American women's pathway to leadership is often wrought with the experiences of marginalization and a lack of proper mentoring. In this regard, Menchaca (2010) has defined marginalization as a form of social exclusion whereby a group or class of individuals is relegated to the fringe of the society. According to Tillman and Scheurich (2013), the marginalization of African American women, based on both race and gender, has the effect of making them feel excluded and they therefore have the perception that they are their own support system, making their pathways to leadership careers difficult and challenging. However, the extent to which this argument is true with respect to African American women principals working in public elementary schools is a research gap with which this study investigates.

Shoho and Barnett (2010) conducted a qualitative research in which they studied 62 newly promoted principals. Their purpose was to determine what challenges the principals encountered, how they compared their expectations, and what their long-term career aspirations were. According to the results of the study, some of the challenges that the principals encountered were related to instructional leadership, managerial problems, and community issues. The results further showed that the job expectations of one new principal were influenced by the experience she had as an assistant principal. Surprisingly, the study revealed that only a few of the principals expected to have long-term careers as school principals. Finally, the study also revealed that new principals were interested in district-level positions within ten years. The goal is to provide support to aspiring principals and keep effective principals in the schools. Perhaps by creating effective mentoring programs at the district level principals will be supported and continue working in the schools and with students instead of seeking central office positions. The participants shared that they would benefit from a mentoring program that included: a screen process to match principal mentors, training for mentoring principal, support throughout the process, coaching, and monitoring of the effectiveness of the program. The participants and researchers speak to the study which recommends that African American principals have mentors who can support, deflect distractions, and share experiences that may help allay some of the angst of the job. Meaning that mentorship and support are critical to the sustainability of African American principals.

**District leadership programs.** The participants shared the importance of having district programs to support and build capacity for school leaders. The principals participated in a variety of district programs that they felt help support them on the career path to the principalship which included: Principals for Tomorrow (PFT), Principal Internship (PI), Future Administrator

Mentoring Experience (FAME), and, Preparing Principal Leaders (PPL). The district in which the participants currently work has discontinued the principal preparatory programs. The principal preparatory programs were programs that provided guidance, support, mentorship, and leadership opportunities for people interested in pursuing the principalship position. The participants explained that the programs focused on best practices in leadership, book studies, information/ strategies on all components of the principalship. The programs were model style classes/ trainings that focused on budget, communication, curriculum, staffing, special education, and leadership skills. The participants' consistency shared that these programs helped them to obtain their positions and supported their career path to the principalship. District leadership may want to look at creating programs and systems that support individuals who are trying to obtain the principal position.

In the district that the participants work, there is only one African American who reports directly to the superintendent. This is a concern and insult to these leaders of color. Further, the participants also said that such a fact is a glaring testament to the interest of diversity in the district. The chief to which the participants look and respect is expected to address inequities in the school system and advocate for the marginalized of the group; however, the expanse of his work prevents him from being able to work closely with the participants in a manner that helps. All of the participants shared that the chief is accessible; and when issues are brought to his attention, responses and actions are taken; however, they feel that there needs to be more personnel must be assigned to him so that he may help address the non-evaluative issues that they face as Black Leaders. One participant stated, "Dr. Bugs is a great asset to the district. We look at him and watch the resistance and racism that he receives and end up hoping that he just stays. His being there is a hope, help, and relief. But we need to be able to meet with him more

and we need more black people in higher levels of the organization that can help him and relate to us.”

The district may need to think about how the highest level of leadership can reflect the workforce. School districts that have a student body that is predominantly black should be able to see leadership at every level of the organization that reflects them. To that point, district level leadership needs to consider how “grass root” organizations can support specific groups serviced in high poverty schools. These groups should convene standing meetings. In these meetings, there can be a non-consequential space for leaders to share their perspectives. In turn, senior leadership should focus on ways to address amend the concerns that are brought to help student achievement.

Young, Crow, Murphy and Ogawa (2009) have posited that leadership training is one of the areas that contributes to career development for principals. The researchers have further contended that leadership training equips principals with the skills and ability to handle school operations and businesses effectively. Importantly, the researchers have also advanced the idea of the need to access peers or cohorts. Based on this, the researchers have contended that principals need to share ideas with their colleagues or peers and learn from one another within their networks. Further, according to the researchers, Young, Crow, Murphy and Ogawa (2009) having access to peers allows principals to share their challenges and solutions as to the nature of their roles as school administrators. Most importantly, newly admitted principals needs to gain practical experiences as they transition from theoretical knowledge. By interacting with experienced principals, new ones gain much in terms of their career development.

**Professional development.** Based on the participants’ responses, professional development could be provided to support elementary principals in high poverty schools.

Students in high poverty schools typically come to schools with a variety of academic, social/emotional, and behavioral needs. An urban school elementary principal needs to be able to support teachers, students, and parents to have a successful school. Professional development could be offered with researched-based behavior systems to support schools. The participants and researcher both explain the challenges of working in schools that have large numbers of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. High poverty schools typically have a larger a number of students who need support with behavior because of mental health challenges. The participants also shared that meeting academic goals set by the State and district is a challenge in high poverty schools because students do not typically start kindergarten with the readiness skills as students starting kindergarten in non-Title One school. Principals may need additional professional development to create systems that support academic growth in high poverty schools. The professional development may focus on researched-based practices in reading and mathematics that catch students up who are not performing on their assigned grade level. The participants shared that to be effective principals in a high poverty schools must have a strong understanding of the students, parents, and the community. Elementary school principals assigned to high poverty schools may benefit from professional development that provides strategies that help them to support, maintain, and implement effective systems for faculty, staff, student, and parent growth.

Educator preparation programs are crucial in every educational institution or system. Dodson (2014) examined the effectiveness of field experiences in terms of preparing principals of educational institutions for the requirements of the job position. The researcher surveyed school principals to examine their preparations for future roles through the school district-led Principal Preparation Program (PPP) that each of the principals attended. The study revealed that

most of the principals who were surveyed had completed field experiences as part of their preparation program. According to the researcher, the principals confirmed that the field experiences were a vital learning program with respect to their principalship roles. Further, the results of the study revealed that the principals indicated that practical and hands-on experiences gained by participating in the PPP prepared them well for their principalship positions, Principals who did not attend such a program acknowledged that they would have been better principals if they had participated in programs that provided them with opportunities to have practical and real-life experiences.

Principal leadership programs offered at institutions of higher education (IHEs) may want to think about how they are preparing principals to lead high poverty schools. The participants in the study explained that the need for support/development with students displaying mental health issues, anger and behavioral management, students lacking basic readiness skills, transiency, and communicating with English language learners (ELL) is consistently increasing. As principals of a high poverty school, the participants believe, they will need additional professional development in the area of reading, English language learners, behavior, partnerships with community mental health agencies, and educating students with emotional and behavioral challenges. In the area of reading the principals expressed concerns over being able to create systems that would increase a student's reading ability over time, so they do not continue to fall behind. Principal leadership programs at higher education may want to think about incorporating programs that include: researched-based strategies that benefit students in poverty, supporting ELL students, behavior support for students who need mental health and emotional behavior assistance, methods of communicating and collaborating with community groups and agencies, and strategies for educating parents about the academic needs of their children.

Michaux (2011) has argued that, even though career development is important to all principals, the training should remain individualized and based on real-world situations affecting the students. This means that training should be targeted at dealing with real-world issues in each school, and should especially focus on the issues that pertain directly to students' success. Since training is important, Awotona (2014) has argued that it should be extended over a relatively long period. This argument seems to suggest that training workshops that last for only a hours or few days may not enable principals to gain enough support to enhance their skills as school administrators.

**Consistency with curriculum/resources.** The principals, like the extant researchers (Charner-Laird et al., 2016; Comber & Woods, 2016; Paulle, 2014; Simon et al., 2013) have commented on the pressures of working in a high poverty school. Provision of equal opportunity in education requires similarity of the quality of schooling that is provided to students in their schools (Baker, 2016). Therefore, equal educational opportunity requires that the quality of principals and teachers be similar among schools that are high poverty compared to schools that are more economically advantaged. Additionally, equality of educational outcomes requires even more efforts from principals and teachers of high poverty schools due to the fact that students in high poverty schools have less resources at home, affecting their academic achievement, which have to be compensated by the schools (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2007; Harris, 2007). As such, this puts higher pressures on principals and teachers working in a high poverty school.

Many high poverty schools are typically the location for new programs and new teachers. The current district system and union allows for seasoned teachers to move to other schools when you have higher seniority. The most at risk students at high poverty schools get the newest

teachers with the least experience. The participants in the study explained that their school is constantly getting new programs and district initiatives; without time to properly train the staff and fully implement the new program. The principals explained that during their tenure, the district has implemented a variety of new reading and mathematics programs; however, they change programs before they have an opportunity to see improvement and progress.

The finding of this study extends the research of Chenoweth and Theokas, which explains that teachers and principals working in high poverty schools have to manage not only the different needs of their students but also the distribution of resources in a school. A lack of appropriate knowledge about the equitable school resource distribution can negatively influence student outcomes (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013). In order to be successful, teachers and principals in high poverty schools have to realize their accountability in the environment of high poverty schools with respect to the outcomes of the students (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006).

**Support from community stakeholders.** The development and learning of students in high poverty schools is affected by many factors, including conflict, illness, fear, anger, and hunger (Parrett & Leverett, 2012). Students who are afraid, tired, and hungry are less capable of being receptive to learning and teaching, irrespective of the methods and materials teachers and principals may employ. Students in high poverty schools may also have learning gaps due to being absent from school or frequent changes in school districts (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006). Therefore, teachers and principals working in high poverty schools are required to have information regarding the effects and extent of poverty. A lack of information about the effects and extent of poverty among teachers and principals may lead to them being unable to appropriately understand the behavior and motivations of their students, leading to severe working challenges (Sass, Hannaway, Xu, Figlio, & Feng, 2012).



The researcher also recommends that the community becomes more versed in the demands of the principal and, in turn, renders support for the principals.

The participants spoke to an undeniable commitment to the community and how they, in some cases, are expected to be more than a conventional principal. Such commitment means that they are often serving as the surrogate mother to students. In many cases, even the very young teachers that principals in high poverty schools must hire due to systematic rules are expected to perform over and above the duties of new teachers in affluent schools. Such unrealistic expectations create another level of challenges for the principal. How does the principal keep the new teacher motivated to work in such demanding positions? To that point, community stakeholders could become advocates for the principals who are obligated to adhere to rules and regulations that dam progress and, in some cases, create an antagonistic relationship between the community and the schoolhouse. Not to posit that the community does not have a place in the design or progress of the school. To the contrary, the researchers believe that when and if the community is informed, engaged, and equipped to support African American principals, then strong connections between the community and schools will grow and become stronger.

The participants spoke to this need and desire to have the community support them in ways that they could. One principal shared, “If I could get a swell of parents and civic organizations to be my evangelists, the gains that we are making, would triple faster. It’s just difficult when some of the community is untrusting, assumptive, and poorly informed.” Inasmuch, the researcher recommends that school systems fervently work with the community to candidly and wholly share the nuances and macro-level issues that principals are facing. In the same vein, recruiting “evangelists of education” to share the happenings in the school house and

with the principal are also suggestions that the researcher sees as a need to harness and help these participants and other school leaders.

### **Future Research Implications**

There are many opportunities for additional research can be done with African American women elementary principals in the K-12 setting that focuses on the career pathway. An implication for future research involves examining career paths of central office personnel with specific attention to leadership roles held in their school district prior to their central office assignment. Another implication for future research is a comparison to leadership qualities/potential of principals in high poverty, low performing schools with qualities of principals in low poverty, high performing school. Future research can be done by researching is a comparative study on needs and allocations of resources for a high poverty school and an affluent school. Additional research can be done by the state departments of education and local school boards to examine multiple ways to measure leadership effectiveness and success. For example, principals assigned high-poverty and low-performing schools could be given adequate time to “turn around” a failing school prior to holding the principal accountable based solely on student performance data.

### References

- Acheampong, L. (2009). *An inquiry into the leadership experiences of African American women principals in catholic schools* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from <https://fordham.bepress.com/dissertations/AAI3361346>
- Allen, Q. (2015). Race, culture and agency: Examining the ideologies and practices of U.S. teachers of Black male students. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 47, 71–81. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2014.12.010
- Andrade, A. D. (2009). Interpretive research aiming at theory building: Adopting and adapting the case study design. *The Qualitative Report*, 14(1), 42-60. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR14-1/diaz-andrade.pdf>
- Andrew, D., Pedersen, P., & McEvoy, C. (2011). *Research methods and design in sport management*. Bradford, UK: Human Kinetics.
- Awotona, A. (2014). *Rebuilding sustainable communities after disasters in China, Japan and beyond*. London, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Baker, B. D. (2016). School finance & the distribution of equal educational opportunity in the Postrecession U.S. *Journal of Social Issues*, 72(4), 629–655. doi:10.1111/josi.12187
- Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2006). Closing the mathematics achievement gap in high-poverty middle schools: Enablers and constraints. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 11(2), 143–159. doi:10.1207/s15327671espr1102\_2
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A., Davidson, H. F., & Davidson, J. (2003). *Bandura's social cognitive theory: An introduction*. United States: Davidson Films, Incorporated.

- Becks-Moody, G. M. (2004). *African American women administrators in higher education: Exploring the challenges and experiences at Louisiana public colleges and universities* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_dissertations/2074](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/2074)
- Benjamin, S. (2006). *The quality rubric: A systematic approach for implementing quality principles and tools in classrooms and schools*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Bergman, M. M. (2008). *Advances in mixed methods research: Theories and applications*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Berliner, D. C. (2014). Effects of inequality and poverty vs. teachers and schooling on America's youth. *Teachers College Record*, 115(120308). Retrieved from [www.tcrecord.org](http://www.tcrecord.org)
- Bogotch, I., & Shields, C. (2013). *International handbook of educational leadership and social (In) justice*. New York, NY: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Brooks, J. (2012). *Black school, white school: Racism and educational (mis) leadership*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Brown, D. A. (2014). *Critical race theory: Cases, materials, and problems*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Brown, K. (2010). *Leading schools of excellence and equity: Closing achievement gaps via academic optimism: Exploring best practices and documenting effective strategies*. New York, NY: Information Age Publishing.
- Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Cabrera, K., & Lonbaken, B. (2011). *Traversing boundaries: Retrospectives on gendered racism in the lives of African-American schoolgirls in the 80s*. New York, NY: Springer.

- Candal, C. (2009). *Partnering for progress: Boston University, the Chelsea public schools, and urban education reform*. New York, NY: Information Age Publishing.
- Careernz. (2015). *Parson's theory*. Retrieved from <https://www.careers.govt.nz/educators-practitioners/career-practice/career-theory-models/parsons-theory/>
- Casey, L., Carlo, M. D., Bond, B., & Quintero, E. (2015). *The state of teacher diversity in American education*. Retrieved from <http://www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/teacherdiversity>
- Chambers, T., & Huggins, S. (2014). The influence of school factors on racial opportunity cost for high-achieving students of color. *Journal of School Leadership*, 24(1), 189-225. Retrieved from <https://rowman.com/page/JSL>
- Charner-Laird, M., Ng, M., Moore, S., Matthew, J., Kraft, A., Papay, J. P., & Reinhorn, S. K. (2016). Gauging goodness of fit: Teachers' assessments of their instructional teams in high-poverty schools (Working Paper). Retrieved from [http://projectngt.gse.harvard.edu/files/gse-projectngt/files/gauging\\_goodness\\_of\\_fit\\_0622916.pdf](http://projectngt.gse.harvard.edu/files/gse-projectngt/files/gauging_goodness_of_fit_0622916.pdf)
- Chenoweth, K., & Theokas, C. (2013). How high-poverty schools are getting it done. *Educational Leadership*, 70(7), 56–59. Retrieved from [www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx)
- Clayborne, H. L. (2006). *Leadership experiences of African American women who are mid-level student affairs administrators* (Retrospective Dissertation). Retrieved from Iowa State University Digital Repository. (AAI3217263)

- Clotfelter, C. T., Ladd, H. F., Vigdor, J. L., & Wheeler, J. (2007). High poverty schools and the distribution of teachers and principals. *North Carolina Law Review*, 85, 1345–1379.  
doi:10.1037/e722752011-001
- Cole, M. (2009). *Critical race theory and education: A Marxist response*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Comber, B., & Woods, A. (2016). Literacy teacher research in high-poverty schools: Why it matters. *Teacher Education for High Poverty Schools*, 193–210. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-22059-8\_11
- Cope, D. G. (2014, January). Methods and meanings: credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research. In *Oncology nursing forum* (Vol. 41, No. 1).
- Cowan Pitre, C. (2014). Improving African American student outcomes: Understanding educational achievement and strategies to close opportunity gaps. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 38(4), 209-217. Retrieved from [www.wsu.edu/~wjbs/](http://www.wsu.edu/~wjbs/)
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Designing a qualitative study: Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Day, C., & Lee, J. (2011). *New understandings of teacher's work: Emotions and educational change*. New York, NY: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Dean, M., Jackson, M., Dyal, A., Wright, J., Carpenter, L., & Austin, S. (2012). Principals' perceptions of the effectiveness and necessity of reading coaches within elementary

- schools. *Reading Improvement*, 49(2), 38-51. Retrieved from [www.projectinnovation.com/reading-improvement.html](http://www.projectinnovation.com/reading-improvement.html)
- Dee, T., & Jacob, B. (2010). The impact of No Child Left Behind on students, teachers, and schools. *Brooks Papers on Economic Activity*, 2010(2), 148-194.  
doi:10.1353/eca.2010.0014
- Delgado, R., & Stenfancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction (2nd ed.)*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2005). And we are still not saved: Critical race theory in education ten years later. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 7-27.  
doi:10.1080/1361332052000340971
- Dodson, R. L. (2014). Which field experiences best prepare future school leaders? An analysis of principal preparation program. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 37(4), 41-56. Retrieved from [www.erquarterly.org/](http://www.erquarterly.org/)
- Dowden-White, P. (2011). *Groping toward democracy: African American social welfare reform in St. Louis, 1910-1949*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.
- Dukakis, M., & Portz, J. (2015). *Leader-managers in the public sector: Managing for results*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ediger, M. (2014). The changing role of the school principal. *College Student Journal*, 48(2), 265-267. Retrieved from [www.projectinnovation.com/college-student-journal.html](http://www.projectinnovation.com/college-student-journal.html)
- Ellis, A., & Brown, C. G. (2015). Pursuing the principalship: Factors in assistant principals' decisions. *School Leadership*, 16, 16-32.

- Evans, S. (2009). *African Americans and community engagement in higher education: Community service, service-learning, and community-based research*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Freeman, K. (2010). Beyond Black Nationalism to black internationalism: The compelling case for examining black educational challenges globally. *International Encyclopedia of Education*, 573-580. doi:10.1016/b978-0-08-044894-7.00144-5
- Fuentes, E. (2013). Political mothering: Latina and African American mothers in the struggle for educational justice. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 44(3), 304-319. doi:10.1111/aeq.12027
- Fujikane, C., & Okamura, J. (2008). *Asian settler colonialism: From local governance to the habits of everyday life in Hawai'i*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.
- Fuller, E., Young, M., Orr, M. T. (2007). *Career pathways of principals in Texas*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Research Association. Chicago, IL.
- Gales-Johnson, K. (2013). *African American women superintendents: Pathways to success* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_dissertations/2069](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/2069)
- Galletta, A. (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication*. New York, NY: NYU Press.
- Gardner, L., Barrett, T. G., & Pearson, L. C. (2014). African American administrators at PWIs: Enablers of and barriers to career success. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 7(4), 235-251. doi:10.1037/a0038317
- Gottheil, F. (2013). *Principles of economics*. London, UK: Cengage Learning.



- Grant, S. G. (2014). *History lessons: Teaching, learning, and testing in U.S. high school classrooms*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Greenhalgh, L., & Lowry, J. (2011). *Minority business success: Refocusing on the American Dream*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Greenwald, R. (2013). *Human subjects research: A handbook for institutional review boards*. New York, NY: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Gumus, E. (2015). Investigation regarding the pre-service trainings of primary and middle school principals in the United States: The case of the State of Michigan. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 15(1), 61-72. doi:10.12738/estp.2015.1.2052
- Gündemir, S., Dovidio, J. F., Homan, A. C., & De Dreu, C. K. (2016). The impact of organizational diversity policies on minority employees' leadership self-perceptions and goals. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 24(2), 172-188. doi:10.1177/1548051816662615
- Hameiri, L., & Nir, A. (2016). Perceived uncertainty and organizational health in public schools: The mediating effect of school principals' transformational leadership style. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 30(6), 771-790. doi:10.1108/ijem-05-2014-0060
- Hamilton-Honey, E. (2013). *Turning the pages of American girlhood: The evolution of girls' series fiction, 1865-1930*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Hanson, J. (2017). Testing the difference between school level and academic mindset in the classroom: Implications for developing student psycho-social skills in secondary school classrooms. *Journal of Educational Issues*, 3(1), 44-63. doi:10.5296/jei.v3i1.10479
- Hardman, M., Drew, C., & Egan, M. (2013). *Human exceptionality: School, community, and family*. London, UK: Cengage Learning.

- Harmon, D., & Jones, T. (2005). *Elementary education: A reference handbook*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Harris, D. N. (2007). High- flying schools, student disadvantage, and the logic of NCLB. *American Journal of Education*, 113(3), 367–394. doi:10.1086/512737
- Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Hennink, M. (2007). *International focus group research: A handbook for the health and social sciences*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Herring, L. N. (2007). *First African-American female school superintendent in Georgia: Reflections from the field to the forefront*. (Doctoral Dissertation) Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/261/>
- Hochbein, C., & Cunningham, B. (2013). An exploratory analysis of the longitudinal impact of principal change on elementary school achievement. *Journal of School Leadership*, 23(1), 64-90. Retrieved from <https://rowman.com/page/JSL>
- Hopson, L., Lee, E., & Tang, N. (2014). A multi-level analysis of school racial composition and ecological correlates of academic success. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 44, 126-134. doi: 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2014.05.026
- Hornsby, A. (2008). *A Companion to African American history*. Winchester, Hampshire: John Wiley & Sons.
- Humphrey, D. L. (2007). *Career development of African American male high school principals*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from <https://getd.libs.uga.edu>.
- Humphrey, M. (2012). *Experiences of African American female community college presidents using a student affairs pathway: A phenomenological study*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (UMI No. 3551624).

- Jackson, J. F. (2012). *Strengthening the African American educational pipeline: Informing research, policy, and practice*. New York, NY: SUNY Press.
- Jackson, T. (2012). Hope and despair: Southern Black women educators across pre- and post-civil rights cohorts theorize about their activism. *Educational Studies*, 48(3), 266-295. doi:10.1080/00131946.2012.660665
- Jean-Marie, G. (2013). The subtlety of age, gender, and race carriers: A case study of early career African American female principals. *Journal of School Leadership*, 23(4), 615-639. Retrieved from <https://rowman.com/page/JSL>
- Johnson-Jones, M. (2009). *Perceptions of African-American female college presidents: Effects of race and gender on career*. Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest.
- Johnson, J. (2013). *Getting to excellence: What every educator should know about consequences of beliefs, values, attitudes, and paradigms for the reconstruction of an academically unacceptable middle school*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.
- Keutel, M., & Mellis, W. (2011). An in-depth interpretive case study in requirements engineering research: Experiences and recommendations. Retrieved from [https://refsq.org/2011/files/2011/03/epical\\_2011.pdf](https://refsq.org/2011/files/2011/03/epical_2011.pdf).
- Kleber, J. (2015). *The encyclopedia of Louisville*. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky.
- Klein, R. (2014). *School integration: Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka*. New York, NY: Rosen Publishing Group.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education?, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24. doi:10.1080/095183998236863

- Lemasters, L., & Smith, M. (2010). What happened to all black principals after Brown? *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 5(4), 1-30. Retrieved from <http://www.ncpeapublications.org/index.php/latest-issue-ijelp>
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (2002). Social cognitive career theory. *Career Choice and Development*, 4, 255-311. doi:10.4135/9781412952675.n261
- Liamputtong, P. (2011). *Focus group methodology: Principle and practice*. London, UK: SAGE.
- Loder, T. (2005). On deferred dreams, callings, and revolving doors of opportunity: African-American women's reflections on becoming principals. *The Urban Review*, 37(3), 244-262. doi:10.1007/s11256-005-0010-6
- Lodico, M. G., Spaulding, D. T., & Voegtle, K. H. (2010). *Methods in educational research: From theory to practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lomotey, K. (2010). *Encyclopedia of African American education (volume 1)*. London, UK: SAGE.
- Lynch, J. (2012). Responsibilities of today's principal: Implications for principal preparation programs and principal certification policies. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 31(2), 40-47. doi:10.1177/875687051203100205
- Lynch, M. (2012). *It's time for a change: School reform for the next decade*. Lanham, ML: R & L Education.
- Martin, J. (2011). *Women as leaders in education: Succeeding despite inequity, discrimination, and other challenges*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- McCarthy, K. (2007). *African American sites in Florida*. New York, NY: Pineapple Press, Inc.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Mezirow, J. (1999). *Transformation theory-postmodern issues*. Retrieved from <http://newprairiepress.org/aerc/1999/papers/29/>
- Michaux, P. (2011). *Memoirs of an inner city elementary school principal*. Bloomington, IN: Author House.
- Miller, K. (2005). *Communication theories: Perspectives, processes, and contexts*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Milner, H. R., & Lomotey, K. (2013). *Handbook of urban education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mock, S. (2012). *Dreaming with the ancestors: Black Seminole women in Texas and Mexico*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Moos, L., Johansson, O., & Day, C. (2011). *How school principals sustain success over time: International perspectives*. New York, NY: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Mule, L. (2010). *Teacher education, diversity, and community engagement in liberal arts colleges*. Lanham, ML: Lexington Books.
- Murtadha, K., & Watts, D. M. (2005). Linking the struggle for education and social justice: Historical perspectives of African American leadership in schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 41(4), 591-608. doi:10.1177/0013161x04274271
- Nauta, M. (2010). The development, evolution, and status of Holland's theory of vocational personalities: Reflections and future directions for counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 57(1), 11-22. doi:10.1037/a0018213
- Okafor, P. (2012). *Alternate route to school effectiveness and student achievement: Circumventing socioeconomic status*. New York, NY: Springer.

- Oppong, S. H. (2013). The problem of sampling in qualitative research. *Asian Journal of Management Sciences and Education*, 2(2), 2186-8441. Retrieved from [ajmse.leena-luna.co.jp/](http://ajmse.leena-luna.co.jp/)
- Parrett, W. H., & Leverett, R. G. (2012). *Turning high-poverty schools into high-performing schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.
- Paulle, B. (2014). *Toxic schools: High-poverty education in New York and Amsterdam*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Picart, C. J. (2013). *Critical race theory and copyright in American dance: Whiteness as status property*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Prescott-Hutchins, S. R. (2002). *The challenges and successes of African American women principals in Georgia: A qualitative profile of lived experiences*. Statesboro, GA: Georgia Southern University.
- Puhan, G. (2013). *Choice of target population weights in rater comparability scoring and equating: Research report ETS RR-13-03*. Princeton, NJ: ETS.
- Queen, J. A., Peel, H., & Shipman, N. (2013). *Transforming school leadership with ISLLC and ELCC*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Quin, J., Deris, A., Bischoff, G., & Johnson, J. T. (2015). Comparison of transformational leadership practices: Implications for school districts and principal preparation programs. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 14(3), 7-85. doi:10.12806/v14/i3/r5
- Ramsey, S. (2008). *Reading, writing, and segregation: A century of black women teachers in Nashville*. South Oak Street, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Reed, D. (2014). *Building the federal schoolhouse: Localism and the American education state*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Reynolds, C, Shaffer, E., & Elsevier, T. (2014). *Advances in school effectiveness research and practice*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Robinson, K. A. (2012). *Institutional factors contributing to the underrepresentation of African American women in higher education: Perceptions of women in leadership positions*. Electronic These & Dissertations. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/811>.
- Saleh, I., & Khine, M. (2014). *Reframing transformational leadership: New school culture and effectiveness*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Sanzo, K. L. (2012). An analysis of evaluation plans in a federally funded leadership preparation program: implications for the improvement of practice. *Planning & Changing*, 43(3/4), 243-259. Retrieved from <https://education.illinoisstate.edu/planning/>
- Sass, T. R., Hannaway, J., Xu, Z., Figlio, D. N., & Feng, L. (2012). Value added of teachers in high-poverty schools and lower poverty schools. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 72(2-3), 104–122. doi:10.1016/j.jue.2012.04.004
- Schwandt, T. A. (1994). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 118- 137). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sharp, W., & Walter, J. (2012). *The principal as school manager*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Shoho, A., & Barnett, B. G. (2010). The realities of new principals: Challenges, joys, and sorrows. *Journal of School Leadership*, 20(5), 561-596. Retrieved from <https://rowman.com/page/JSL>
- Simon, N. S., Johnson, S. M., Papay, J., Kraft, M., Reinhorn, S., Marietta, G., ... Paul (2013). Project on the next generation of teacher turnover in high-poverty schools: What we

- know and can do. Retrieved from <http://dosen.narotama.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Teacher-Turnover-in-High-Poverty-Schools-What-We-Know-and-Can-Do.pdf>
- Smith, G. (2013). *Coping with workplace isolation: A case of female African American administrators*. Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest.
- Smith, J. (2010). *Encyclopedia of African American popular culture*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- Stanford, K. L. (2010). *African Americans in Los Angeles*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing.
- Stitt-Gohdes, W. L. (1997). Career development: Issues of gender, race, and class. *Information Series No. 371*, 1-72. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov>
- Stovall, D. (2006). Forging community in race and class: Critical race theory and the quest for social justice in education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 9(3), 243-259.  
doi:10.1080/13613320600807550
- Tate, W. (2012). *Research on schools, neighborhoods, and communities: Toward civic responsibility*. Lanham, ML: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Teddlie, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed methods sampling: A typology with examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), 77-98. doi:10.1177/2345678906292430
- Terzi, L. (2010). *Justice and equality in education: A capability perspective on disability and special educational needs*. London, UK: A&C Black.
- The National Equity Atlas (2016). *School poverty*. Retrieved from [http://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/School\\_poverty](http://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/School_poverty)
- Tillman, L. (2008). African American principals and the legacy of Brown. *Review of Research in Education*, 28, 101-146. doi:10.4135/9781412982788.n11



- Tillman, L., & Scheurich, J. (2013). *Handbook of research on educational leadership for equity and diversity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Toldson, I. (2013). *Black male teachers: Diversifying the United States' teacher workforce*. London, United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Tomal, D., & Schilling, C. (2013). *Resource management for school administrators: Optimizing fiscal, facility, and human resources*. Lanham, ML: R & L Education.
- Townsend, T., & MacBeath, J. (2011). *International handbook of leadership for learning*. New York, NY: Springer Science & Business Media.
- VanTuyle, V., & Hunt, J. (2013). Will new Illinois principal preparation programs fix Illinois public schools? *Critical Questions in Education*, 4(3), 235-242. Retrieved from <https://academyforeducationalstudies.org/journals/journal/>
- Weiler, S., & Cray, M. (2012). Commentary: Measuring Colorado superintendents' perceptions of principal preparation programs. *Educational Considerations*, 39(2), 66-76.  
doi:10.4148/0146-9282.1116
- White-Smith, K. (2012). Beyond instructional leadership: The lived experiences of principals in successful urban schools. *Journal of School Leadership*, 12(1), 6-25. Retrieved from <https://rowman.com/page/JSL>
- William, E. (2007). *Mentoring relationships and the career advancement of African American female administrators in higher education: exploring intersections of race and gender*. Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest
- Williams, R. (2014). *Men of color in higher education: New foundations for developing models for success*. New York, NY: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

- Wilson, G., & Roscigno, V. (2010). Race and downward mobility from privileged occupations: African American/white dynamics across the early work-career. *Social Science Research*, 39(1), 67-77. doi:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2009.03.008
- Yang, Y. (2014). Principals' transformational leadership in school improvement. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 28(3), 279-288. doi:10.1108/ijem-04-2013-0063
- Yin, R. K. (2012). *Applications of case* Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Young, M., Crow, G., Murphy, J., & Ogawa, R. (2009). *Handbook of research on the education of school leaders*. New York, NY: Routledge.

**Appendix A: Online Survey**

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. Where did you grow up?
3. What was your childhood education like, your upbringing?
4. At what point in your career did you consider becoming a school administrator (Ex. teacher, resource coach, counselor, etc.)
5. Did someone recommend you or ask you to become an administrator?
6. Have you have a minority administrator?
7. How did you become a principal? What was your path?
8. Can you provide examples of what you thought the job would be like?
9. What was your education or training for your principal position?
10. What was your formal preparation?
11. Where was the institution where you were prepared?
12. What preparation prepared you to lead an urban elementary school? Did any of your classes address equity, poverty, or diversity?
13. What did your preparation program prepare you well to do and what are or areas would you have liked greater emphasis?
14. Were you ever a principal in a school classified as a priority school, focus school, or a school needing improvement?
15. What leadership role have you taken in raising student achievement in your school?
16. Has the administrative role been what you expected it to be? Please explain.

### **Appendix B: Interview Questions**

1. What relevant experiences influenced your career pathways in becoming an elementary school principal?
2. What support systems have influenced your career path towards becoming an elementary school principal?
3. What barriers as a female did you encounter with regard to your career path towards becoming an elementary school principal?
4. What barriers as an African American did you encounter with regard to your career path towards becoming an elementary school principal?
5. How have educational institutions helped in supporting your career path as an African American female principal?
6. How have communities helped in supporting your career path as an African American female principal?
7. How have professional organizations helped in supporting your career path as an African American female principal?

**Appendix C: Focus Group Questions**

1. What was a critical moment while developing your career as a principal in a public elementary school?
2. What were some barriers in becoming a principal?
3. How do you as an African American do you feel that race makes a difference as to how you lead?
4. What has influenced you as a principal?
5. How have educational institution, communities and professional organizations helped to support your career path into becoming a principal?
6. What support system do you feel has supported you as principal?
7. What has affected you career and journey to the principal position? Please provide examples.